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NETHERLEIGH  
BY  
W. RILEY

AUTHOR  
OF  
WINDYRIDGE

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

FORTY-SIXTH THOUSAND

# WINDYRIDGE

*Pall Mall Gazette*.—" ' Windyridge ' can be heartily recommended."

*Saturday Review*.—" Oh, ' Windyridge ' were paradise enow."

*Academy*.—" ' Windyridge ' is an arresting, fascinating book, one to read and read again."

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*Outlook*.—" A revelation of how much pleasure can be got from the perusal of a sincere and simple description of the real things of life."

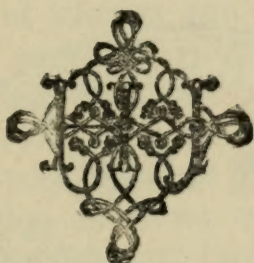
*Bookman*.—" The story has an atmosphere and a curious charm of its own that are not easy to define ; there is a sort of dream-magic about it ; a delicate lavender-like fragrance."

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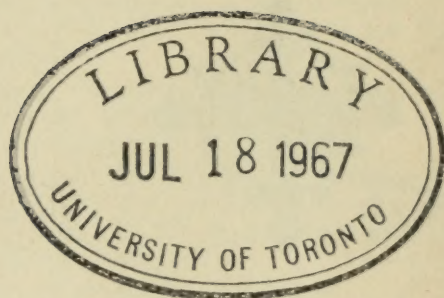
# NETHERLEIGH

BY  
THE  
AUTHOR  
OF  
"WINDYRIDGE"  
(W. RILEY)



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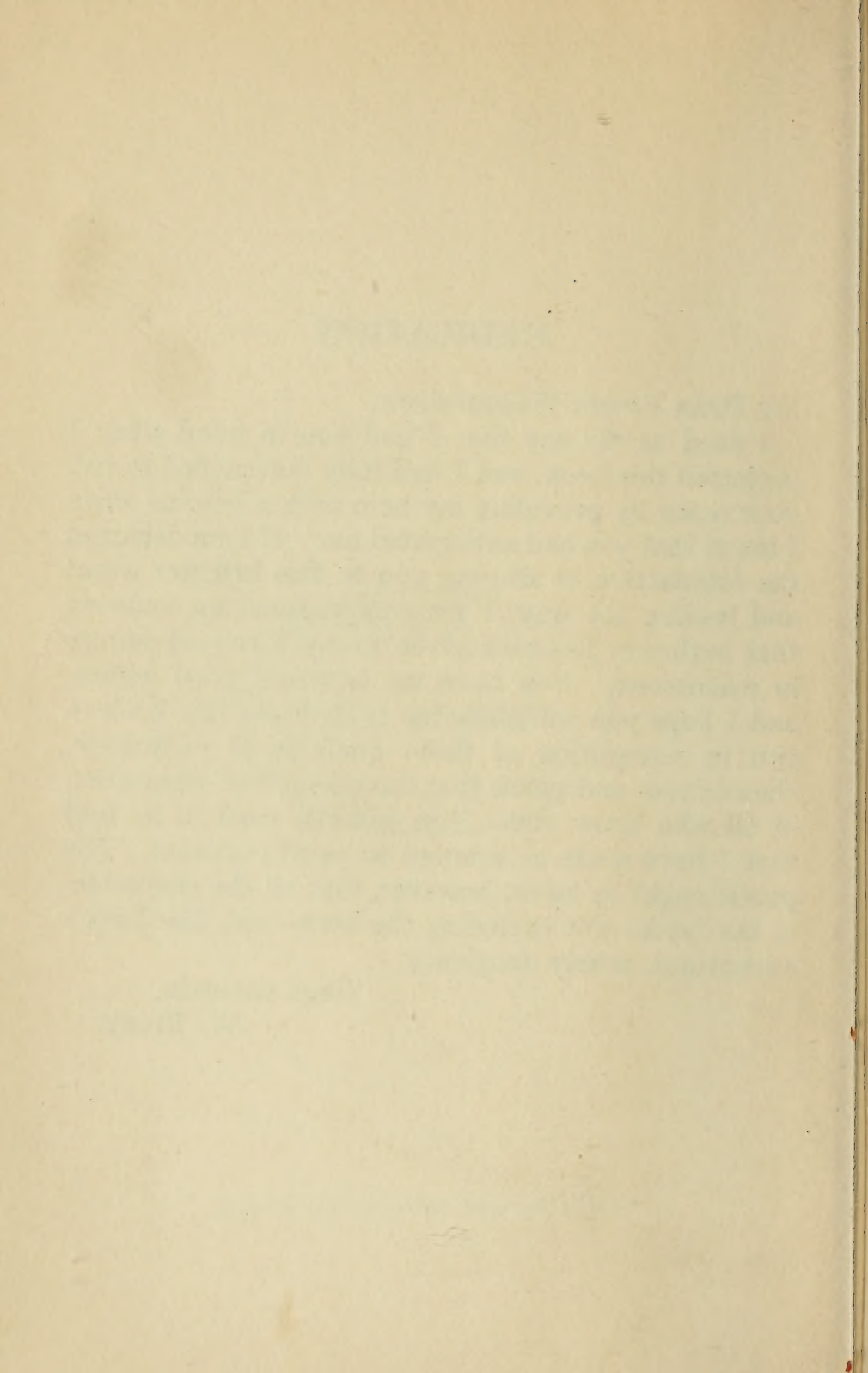
## DEDICATION

MY DEAR EDWIN WADDINGTON,

I need hardly say that I had you in mind when I projected this book, and I had fully determined to risk your scorn by providing my hero with a heroine when I found that you had anticipated me. If I am debarred the satisfaction of alluring you to this brighter world and leading the way, I am compensated by knowing that authority has been given to my hero's adventure in matrimony. You have my heartiest good wishes, and I hope you will allow me to dedicate this book to you in recognition of those qualities of endurance, cheerfulness and pluck that have been the admiration of all who know you. You will not need to be told that I have made no attempt to paint portraits. The public ought to know, however, that all the characters in the book—not excluding the hero—are, like Dick's adventures, purely imaginary.

Yours sincerely,

W. RILEY.





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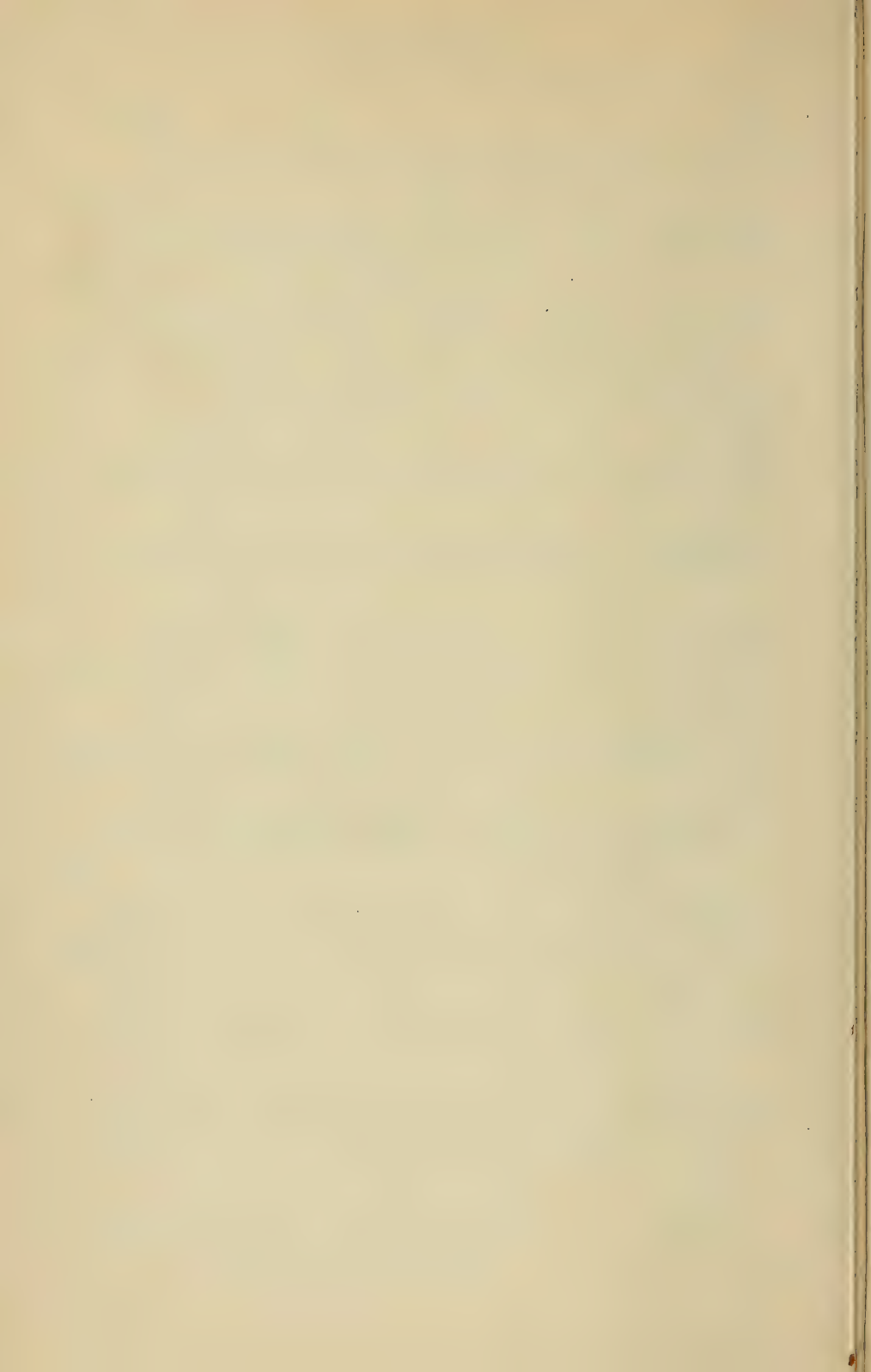
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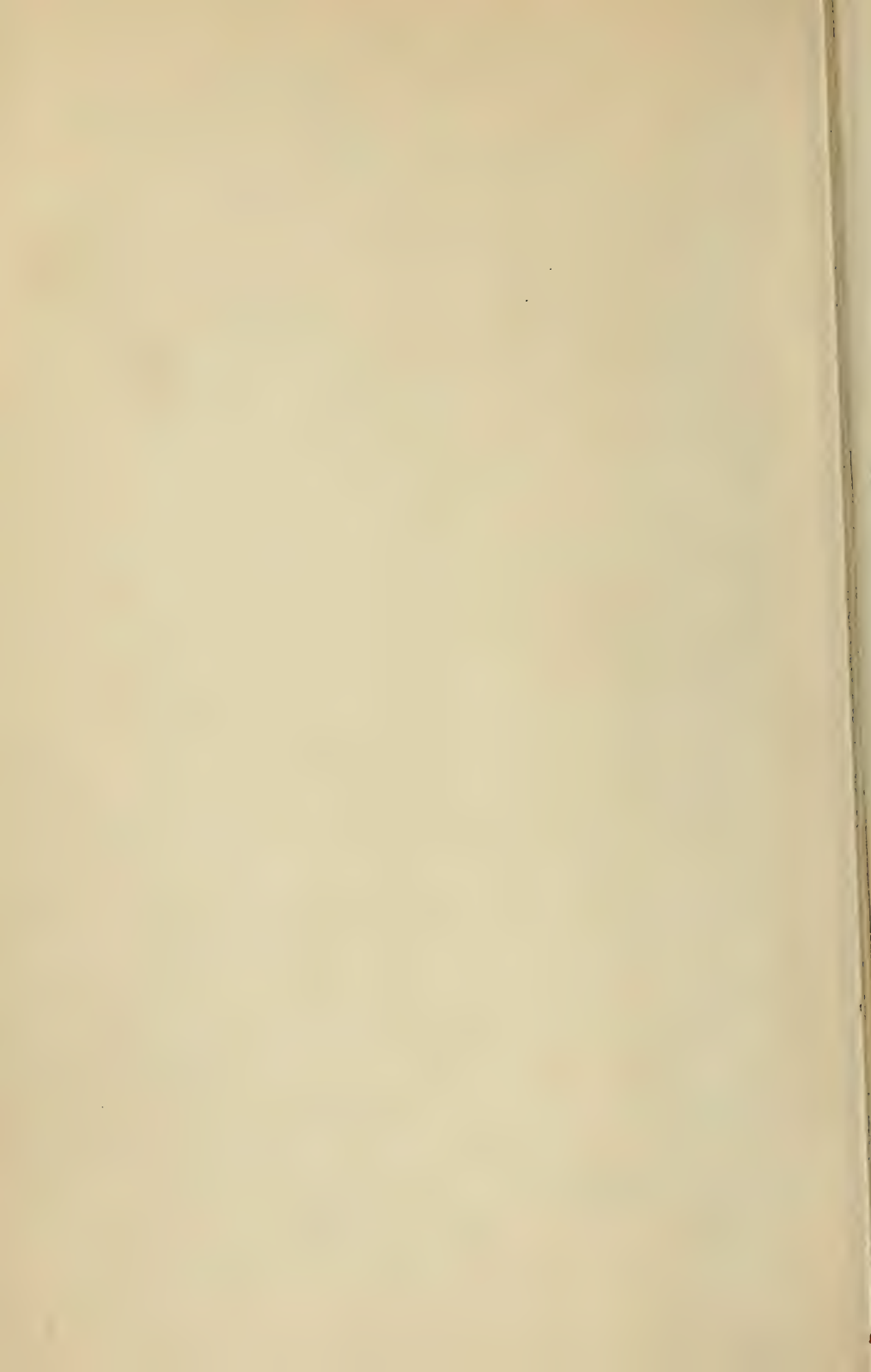
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NETHERLEIGH  
BY  
W. RILEY

AUTHOR  
OF  
WINDYRIDGE





# NETHERLEIGH

## CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE NEW DOCTOR PRESCRIBES FOR A MUMMY

THE New Doctor and the New Doctor alone is responsible for this adventure in autobiography. He had spent half an hour over the examination, asking some questions which I could answer by word of mouth, and others to which my internal organs had to reply in that quiet voice to hear which the ear has to be assisted. I was glad when it was all over, and he crossed the room and, dividing his coat tails, stood with his back to the fire.

“ Well ? ” I said.

He answered with another question. “ How old are you ? ”

I shook my head. “ That’s a disputed point. There is a tradition in the family that I was born twenty-five years ago, and the fountain-pen you see there—not the shabby one ; the one with the gold bands on—was given to me yesterday for the purpose of ticking off another milestone.”

I paused to scrutinize my metaphor, and the doctor remarked—“ Then you were twenty-five yesterday ? ”

“ According to mother and the family Bible, yes ;

but the tradition is unreliable. As a matter of fact I was in at the building of the Pyramids."

"Really?" he said, with just the slightest elevation of his eyebrows. "No wonder your heart is in a funny state. As a relic you must be uncommonly interesting. All the same I think I'd better follow the family Bible. You see your mother's word would carry weight with most people."

I agreed. "We can't help that, can we? Most people swallow what is offered them by authority and ask no questions; but to say that I've lived only twenty-five years is, I repeat, ridiculous. I've lived thousands."

"Lived?" he queried.

I liked the man. He had a strong, sensible face, for one thing, and he went about his business as if he understood it. There was a look in his eyes that spoke of quick intelligence, and he could laugh on occasion—a real mirthful laugh that made me envious. I instinctively realised that we were destined to be friends and should understand each other.

"Well," I replied, "there is, perhaps, some exaggeration wrapped up in the verb, but not in the thing it stands for. At any rate I have existed thousands of years—I must have."

"And during all these piled-up centuries you have——?" His eyebrows completed the question.

"Been in at everything worth talking about. Hunted with Nimrod; galloped to Achilles at Troy ran for help when Horatius kept the bridge; drank some of the stuff Cleopatra crushed her pearls into, and made a face over it. You have the record of my experiences there." I nodded in the direction of the bookshelves.

He just glanced at them and for a moment said nothing, but looked at me half-humorously, yet with meaning. He can make his eyes talk when he wants to. They were talking now, but I was not heeding because I was engaged in wondering how old he was. His hair is quite grey, but there is plenty of it, and the face and eyes contradict the greyiness. I doubt if he is more than forty. I should think he is faddy about his clothes, for he is decidedly well-groomed. I thought of his predecessor—Old Banks, as everybody called him—who always wore shabby suits which the irreverent suggested had been bought at a jumble sale; and I smiled.

The smile unloosed the doctor's tongue. "I'm glad you can do that," he said; and he laughed like a boy. "I was afraid your emotions might be atrophied. Now look here, young man, you interest me. As a mummy you're a success—nobody will dispute that. You're well-preserved; have more animation than could reasonably be expected of a mummy, and can smile. But"—he came forward and folded his arms over the rail at the foot of the bed, looking keenly into my eyes—"don't you think it might pay you better to *live*?"

My thoughts became bitter, but as he evidently expected an answer, I inquired:

"And how am I to live, chained to a couch and imprisoned in an attic, with a heart that one day hurries on like a clock with the weight off, and the next day makes up for it by taking long periods of rest—how can I live?"

He still looked at me with firmly closed lips.

"Do you realise," I continued, "that I've spent all my life in this blessed attic—if I may call it life?"



I don't know, of course, but I almost dare bet that you've crossed the English Channel oftener than I've crossed Netherleigh Market Place. You'll hardly believe it, but I've never set foot outside this sleepy hole, and know nothing of the world except what the newspaper and those books tell me. And then you urge me to live! I've been on the point of dying a thousand times, and have looked forward to it with something like pleasure, but I've given up expecting that now. I'm not a human being at all. I'm a 'case'—a curiosity—a something to be kept alive because family affection and professional etiquette require it. And you coolly suggest that it would pay me better to live!"

"Yes; but don't excite yourself," the firm voice interposed.

"I never do. I wish I could. I've been schooled in self-repression until it's second nature. I get full up at times, of course, but never with a sudden rush; and when it does happen, the mechanism inside releases a clutch and lets out a swear word or two, and the tension is relieved. But it's a very dove-like roar, you understand—a sort of coo with a cough in it."

I thought he might have smiled, but he didn't. "I know," he said; "it's rotten for you. But now tell me. Do you seriously mean that you can count the hours you have spent in the open air? When you were a boy——?"

"I never was a boy. Don't you understand that this heart of mine was a birthday gift? My earliest recollection is of lying in a cot beside the big bed downstairs, and thinking how much older I was than mother. You may smile, but it's literally true. You may know a good deal about my disease from your



books, but you don't know what it feels like to have it, and I do. I've always been old. I feel years and years older than you : older than anybody I ever see. I've lived in the past until the past is part of me, and ever so much more real than the present. As to going out into the fresh air, I could pretty well give you the date and details of every experiment I've made in that direction."

He went back to the fire, and turned his back upon me for a moment or two ; then he faced me again.

" Well," he said, " I wouldn't do it. You've got the rummest heart I ever heard of, but on the lowest estimate—your mother's—it has kept going, more or less, for five-and-twenty years ; and yet on your own admission you are little better than a slightly animated mummy. I'm not mocking you when I say that I'm hanged if I'd do it."

" Do you smoke ? " I asked. I was still rather bitter. " There's a box of cigars over there that dad and the parson dip into when they come up."

He shook his head, scarcely heeding.

" I don't quite like to say what I think," he continued. " You see, Banks has known you from your birth, and no doubt he was convinced that the prison and the chain were the best for you ; but—well, I wouldn't do it."

" Wouldn't do what ? "

" Coop myself up in an attic and wait for the Resurrection."

" You would have one big bust and finish it ? " I suggested.

" I would take a big risk, anyhow. ' One crowded hour of glorious life ' would be worth all this." He swept his hand towards my books. " Didn't your

friend Achilles tell you that he made that same choice in his youth ? ”

“ You don’t forget that I have to be carried up and down these stairs ? ” I remarked.

“ I don’t forget anything ; and though I may be talking like a fool, I don’t think I am. I don’t quite know what to make of that heart of yours, but it’s my opinion that it will stand more than you imagine. At any rate if I were in your slippers I would begin to live even if it should kill me.”

“ You’ll have to explain,” I said. “ You see your predecessor always insisted that I must be kept very quiet ; and I suppose I’ve got to like it in a way—a case of hugging my chains. Now——”

He interrupted me and spoke a little more sharply.

“ Banks is in Bournemouth, enjoying the evening of his days, I hope ; and I’ve a great respect for him. But though I’ve bought his practice I use my own judgment. I’ll continue to visit you, and shove strychnine and so on into you at intervals, if you wish ; and as it was in the beginning, so it shall be now and to the end of the chapter. But I tell you frankly if I were in your place I’d have a flutter and risk a bit. Some mummies would go to pieces, I don’t doubt, if a breath of fresh air were to get at them, but I don’t believe you would.”

“ What sort of a job would you have me seek ? ” I asked : then repented, as I saw his eyebrows contract. “ No, I beg your pardon, doctor, I really do want to know what you are driving at.”

“ I want you to live and to take part in life,” he replied. “ You only dream of it. If I read you aright, you have something of the poet, something of the philosopher in you, but you cannot be either, for

you don't know life at first hand. I doubt if you could even become a mystic of the first-class. I don't altogether believe that God gave you that heart, but, whether He did or no, I feel sure He didn't mean you to spend your days in an attic merely reading about life. Live, man ! if only for a month."

"How am I to begin ?"

"You're clever enough to find that out for yourself," he answered. Then he went to the window. "Who lives in this end cottage ?" he inquired abruptly.

"Heaven knows," I replied ; "but whoever they are they'd probably be offended if they heard you call it a cottage. These houses are described in the paper as 'desirable family residences' !"

The doctor ignored all chaff.

"Heaven may know, but you obviously don't," he said, and there was a note of sarcasm in his voice. "Yet I suppose you could tell me the name of the street and the number of the house where Jason lodged when he went on that Golden Fleece business."

I succumbed to the temptation.

"Street of Hecate," I replied. "Corner house with a balcony. His apartments were on the first floor. You rang twice for the elevator."

"Did you really ?" he observed. "Well, I only wish you were as well informed about your neighbours."

"My neighbours are not Jasons," I interrupted.

"How do you know that ?" he replied sharply—almost sternly. "They are beings of flesh and blood, with hopes and fears and disappointments worth everything you have in those books. I haven't a word to say against books ; but you've a soul that's healthy enough, whatever may be the matter with your heart, and you can't feed your soul on books."



All *Plutarch's Lives* could not give you as many thrills or teach you as many lessons as could be got out of those six commonplace stone cottages."

It was a new idea and I turned it over. The doctor threw the window wide open, and sat down upon the ledge.

"Gad! what a country this is," he said; "and what air!" He swallowed great draughts of it as if it had been nectar. "The sun is setting over the moors and they are bathed in gold. It fires my blood, man, and you lie there unconcerned. The view from this window is unrivalled in all Yorkshire, I'll wager."

I am really as conceited about my view as if I had made it, but a perverse mood was on me, and I said with an attempt at nonchalance:

"Netherleigh is very proud of its gas-works, and they are certainly seen to advantage from where you stand."

He ignored my remark—he seemed to ignore all my remarks—and, when I came to think about it, this raised him still further in my estimation.

"Well, I'm going to prescribe for you," he said, as he closed the window. He rested his right elbow on the mantelpiece and passed his hand over his brow several times.

"You have your emergency medicines, and I am not going to add to them. They have their uses, but I am no great believer in drugs. But take a dose or two of human nature every day and watch the results and record them in writing. There are scores of people in this sleepy hole, as you call it, and in the hamlets on these moors, who are helping to form English character and to make English history. They are alive, and they can help you to live, and what is equally



to the point you can help them. Take large doses of them. In this attic, at first; and if you can stand that, then go farther afield. Get some twentieth-century life into this room. It'll be rough on your mother's stair carpets, but I hope you'll live to see them worn bare. And if I am wrong and it kills you—well, you'll have lived for ten minutes anyhow, and you can go and make the next place richer for that ten-minutes' experience. I would."

"And you would begin with the end cottage?" I suggested.

"Begin where you like," he said. "Begin with the red-haired girl who let me in. There's character in her face. Find out what sort it is. Tell yourself all about it, and about the thousand-and-one other things that this will lead to."

"Well, Harriet (she calls herself 'Arriet) doesn't promise to be very exciting. I might try her for a beginning," I said. "But when it comes to going out and roaming the moors I foresee difficulties. To my parents and friends I am not flesh and blood, but spirit, and if you take the stopper away I shall volatilize and 'leave not a rack behind.' I've never been anything but trouble and expense to them, yet they have convinced me that they really want to keep me here."

"Would you risk it yourself?"

"Yes: the scheme has the charm of novelty, and volatilization has no terrors for me."

"Now look here, Mr. Richard," he began.

"Shall we say 'Dick,'" I interposed. "Old Banks called me Dick, of course, and you are in the Apostolic Succession. It sounds friendlier."

"I should like to," he said. "I was going to say

that I shall keep my eye on you, naturally, and not let you go too fast. But there is a risk, I know, and I must see your father and tell him so, and explain myself more fully. If he won't have it there's an end of it ; but I really think it's worth trying ! And you would thank me."

"Try mother instead," I suggested. "If you can carry that position you have taken the city. Dad never interferes with domestic matters. I believe he's quite well-to-do, but his bump of caution is almost big enough to be an eyesore, and I have always understood that when he was still a young man he settled the house and all it contained on mother. It contained me—attic furniture, you understand—and, in short, if mother approves, there will be no effective opposition."

"I'll see her as I go down," he said.

## CHAPTER II

IN WHICH DAD WASHES HIS HANDS OF THE BUSINESS,  
AND HARRIET WASHES THE FLOOR

I NEARLY forgot my good resolution during the night, or rather I came very near to repenting of it. I was wakeful—no new experience, unfortunately, but I was also mentally restless. It was a very black night and at times a northerly wind beat the rain against my window-panes with some violence ; and when the wind dropped the rain came down the chimney and fell sizzling upon the hot coals.

It was just the sort of night to make a lazy invalid satisfied with his lot ; and those mysterious inward voices which delight to argue matters out whilst you lie still and listen, had a good time in debating the wisdom or otherwise of the step I was proposing to take. I had, of course, a hazy sort of notion that I should have to rouse myself sufficiently to take sides in the end, for a man must be master in his own house, even if it be a house of ghosts ; but for a good while I was content to sit back, so to speak, and listen, like a cynical or patient judge who will give opposing counsel plenty of rope.

The humour of the fancy struck me, and as argument and counter-argument followed, I caught myself turning my head from side to side as if to lend a readier ear to what was being said. Then I pulled myself



up and delivered my verdict and the rival voices ceased. I was almost relieved to find that the decision of the previous evening had been confirmed.

When morning peeped in through my dormer-window, and the moorland, with its face newly-washed and rosy from the north wind's rough towelling, smiled upon me as invitingly as a lover, all the night's forebodings vanished, and I actually looked forward to the day's experiences with a sense of exhilaration.

"Let me see," I said to myself. "It is Friday. Mother will bring in my breakfast, and when I have dressed and rested awhile Harriet will come to wash the linoleum and make my room tidy. I will begin life with a study of 'Arriet.'"

I began earlier than that, however. When mother brought in the tray and proceeded to shake up my pillows, I looked at her so curiously that she actually blushed.

"What's the matter with you, you silly boy?" she asked.

"I've got to take regular doses of human nature," I replied; "so I'm beginning with you."

We postponed serious discussion on the new life until the afternoon, but that it had been debated downstairs was evident when dad came up to say "Good-morning."

Dad and the doctor have one characteristic in common; but dad is either less sensitive or prepared to take bigger risks.

"Are you wearing your brown mixtures?" I asked.

"Yes, why? What's the matter with it?" he asked, looking down a wide expanse of waistcoat as though he thought he might have spilled his egg on it.



"Nothing," I replied. "I thought I detected a faint odour of burning, but it isn't offensive, and in any case it'll have to be a bad scorch before it shows."

"Nonsense!" he jerked; but he moved an inch farther from the fire before he attacked me afresh.

"You're old enough to know your own mind, of course, and you'll please yourself. You favour your mother" (dad uses these local phrases sometimes) "and the Jenningses have all a strain of stupidity in them. 'Grit,' they call it; but it's a touch of the donkey, *I* say. However, that's neither here nor there. I'm only a plain business man who's made his way by using his bit of common sense, and it isn't likely that what I say'll go for much. And I'm not going to veto it, mind you. I have my opinion and I know what'll happen, but if you and your mother choose to gamble with life for the fun of the thing, I shan't interfere with you. Only don't forget that this hare-brained young chap has naught to lose—it isn't his gamble. Don't forget that I told you that."

"Well, I don't know," I ventured. "Old Banks did fairly well out of me, didn't he?"

Dad consented to be side-tracked. "Banks did well out of *me*, I know that. He made a small fortune out of me: drew his cheque as regular as a pension. It isn't every medico has as good a friend as I've been to Banks."

He stopped to warm himself at the glow of this consideration, and it occurred to me that I might reasonably lay a claim upon the doctor's gratitude, though further reflection showed me that if one went far enough back dad's was the stronger position; so I said nothing.

"Not that I grudge the money, of course," he went

on, expanding into geniality under the influence of gratifying thoughts. "I daresay if all was reckoned up the balance wouldn't be so very far on the wrong side. One has to bring common-sense to bear, Dick, on questions of this sort. There are men who'd reckon up what you'd cost 'em and count it all loss. But that's nonsense. What'ud have happened if you'd been like other fellows? A thousand to one you'd have been gallivanting off to Oxford or some German place where money is made to run away like water. And it would never have entered your head that money isn't picked up in the street. Easy come, and easy go. Now when I was a lad I'd to begin to bring money in at the age when boys nowadays are playing with lead soldiers and have a nurse to look after 'em; and what schooling I got had to be at a night school. But that's an old story, and I came to find out what you think yourself about this daft scheme?"

I told him, but he was too impatient to listen, and he seized the first opportunity to interrupt me.

"If you've made up your mind, there's an end of it. I haven't another word to say—not one. I can understand you well enough. I can put the attraction in one word—novelty. And hang the consequences, of course. Nothing simpler. But I can't understand your mother; I'm blest if I can. She'd carry on no end if anything was to happen to you: fret herself to death, I know she would. And yet if you were to take it into your head to be a sprinter I believe she'd go out and buy you a pair of running-pants straight away. There's no bigger contradiction on earth than a woman; nowhere there isn't."

I was not in a position to dispute this generalisation

from experience, so I merely smiled and dad looked at his watch.

"Well, I'm wasting words, I know, but there's no reason why I should waste time. Time's money, and whilst I'm standing here my men'll be standing about. I'll go where what I have to say will be attended to, Dick, so good-morning; and if things don't go right don't blame me."

Harriet appeared on the scene about eleven o'clock, by which time I was dressed and only too comfortably settled in my easy chair by the fire. She seemed surprised when she found that I did not propose to step across the landing into the spare room where the gas-fire had been lighted for me.

"An island, Harriet," I said; "is a piece of land surrounded by water. Do you think you could manage to look upon me as an island and wash round me, leaving me undisturbed? The linoleum cannot be dirty under the rug, and if it is it won't show. You see I've got a lazy fit on this morning."

She looked at me hesitatingly for a few seconds. She is a recent importation from a village a few miles away, and has hitherto treated me with respect and, I am afraid, with awe. I have no doubt that Simpson has told her that I am liable to crumble to pieces all at once if I am handled roughly, and Harriet is decidedly rough. Simpson, on the other hand, prides herself, I know, on being "quite the lady," and I surmise, has been long enough in the family to have lost both respect and fear for the exacting occupant of the attic. But then Simpson is very superior, and calls herself "cook," though in our unpretentious household mother does a good bit of the cooking herself.



Harriet is only in training for a housemaid, and little better than a scullery-maid.

She was, however, proof against my suggestion and shook her head with deferential firmness.

"Ee, I couldn't do it, Miss Trichud." I cannot write it any other way—"Miss Trichud," it has always been and remains. "Missus 'ud say 'at I'd 'ad a lazy fit on if I was to leave it. It 'ud be as much as my place is worth." She closed her lips and again shook her head with decision.

I invented a sigh of resignation and told her I would move when the inevitable moment should arrive, and professed to busy myself with the newspaper.

The girl's quick movements interested me. She worked with a will yet not fussily, and gave all her attention to her work. Her red hair was almost concealed by a mob-cap (not that I'm at all sure what a mob-cap is) made apparently of some kind of flowered stuff. She has a brown face, plentifully freckled, but shrewd and sensible, I thought. She is of average height and rather thickly built: the sort of girl who will probably develop into a fat woman eventually; but at present she is neither unwieldy nor uncomely, and I guessed her age at twenty-two or three.

She did not speak until the course of operations brought her near the bookshelves, when admiration got the better of reserve.

"Ee, Miss Trichud, I never seed so many books i' all my born days. It fair took my bref when I seed 'em t' first time."

"Then you've never been inside a library, Harriet?" She shook her head.

"Ther' isn't one i' Overburn, where I come thro' an' I ain't much of a scholar. We've only three



books at 'ome, barrin' Bibles an' 'ymn books, an' one of 'em's 'Baxter's Saints' Rest,' an I forget what t'others is but they're summat o' t' same sort. Nay, I'm forgettin'. Ther's another i' t' winda—a big 'un—at we stand a plant-pot on, but I believe that's a Bible an' all."

"Then you wouldn't appreciate my books, Harriet?"

She shook her head vigorously and turning the scrubbing-brush upside down scraped the floor with it carefully. "Ther's some muck o' some sort got trodden 'ard on," she explained. It came off at last, and she returned to my question as she rinsed her cloth.

"It's above me. I tried to read some 'o t' names when you was i' t' spare room t' other day, but I couldn't make much out; but my friend 'ud give anythin' nearly to see 'em."

"She is fond of reading?" I surmised.

Harriet bent over her pail. "It isn't a she, it's a 'im," she explained; and I laughed, whereupon the fringe of red hair beneath her cap mingled with the colour that rushed to her forehead, and was temporarily lost.

"I see," I laughed, "is he the young gentleman I saw walking up the drive the other evening about half-past seven?"

"No," said Harriet, and from the way she said it I realised that I had made a particularly bad shot. "That was 'Melia's young man" (Amelia was the name given to Simpson by her god-parents in baptism). "My friend doesn't wear yellow washleather gloves. 'E isn't 'shamed of 'is 'ands if 'e does work with 'em." She turned up her nose and scrubbed for a while more vigorously than ever.

"Then what is the difference," I inquired at length, "between a 'friend' and a 'young man'?"

Harriet discreetly turned her back upon me—a precautionary device which I appreciated but regretted.

"Well, ther' is a difference," she said. "'Melia's courtin' proper. She wears a ring on a Sunda', an' when she 'as her night out, but Pimple an' me 'asn't got as far as that."

"Pimple?" I queried.

"I call 'im 'Pimple,'" she said, "'cos 'e 'as one fair o' t' side of 'is nose, but 'is real name's Fred. 'E doesn't mind me callin' 'im Pimple."

"Perhaps when he develops into a 'young-man,'" I suggested, "he may raise objections. He may feel that he has to tread carefully at the present stage."

"Well, if 'e didn't like it I should drop it," she said, and I thought this augured well for the future.

"So Pimple would like to see my books?" I continued.

"'E'd give his eyes for t' chance; an' I shall 'ave to ask ye to move now, Miss Trichud."

I moved, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"That would be an unfortunate bargain, don't you think, Harriet? Without his eyes it would be difficult for him to see the books."

"It was only a manner o' speakin'," she replied. "'E's that fond o' readin', I've known 'im buy a book afore 'bacca."

From the tone in which this was said I inferred that Harriet had offered the strongest proof conceivable. Self-sacrifice on a heroic scale, it seemed to her.

"Is it your night out on Sunday?" I inquired.

"No," with another shake of the head, "I'm out to-morra, but it's 'Melia's turn o' Sunda'."

"Then would your friend like to spend an hour or so with me? If he would you may ask him to come up."

The girl's eyes brightened. "Ee, you wouldn't, would you, Miss Trichud? 'E'd be that proud there'd be no livin' with 'im. But," and her face fell, "you don't 'ave no comp'ny, do you? 'Melia says 'at it's as much as your life's worth."

"Oh, I'll risk it, Harriet. You see I'm turning over a new leaf. You may even see me out before long."

"But if it was to bring on one o' your bad girds, Miss Trichud, it 'ud be a mess. An' what would t' missus say then, an' t' master?"

"Leave them to me, Harriet," I replied. "You tell him to look in about seven o'clock on Sunday."



## CHAPTER III

### IN WHICH MY BILL PASSES THE UPPER HOUSE

WHEN I came to think over the conversation with Harriet it seemed commonplace enough, and yet I had enjoyed it. I don't know why it should have been so but there awoke in me a desire to see her people, the village she came from, the home where she had been reared, with the big Bible supporting the plant-pot in the window. I began to picture the place and its inhabitants, as I had pictured Memphis and Carthage and a hundred other cities where the men and women I knew best had done the deeds which had made history. Then the tantalising thought came to me that Overburn was near at hand, only a stone's throw, so to speak, beyond the hill that faced me as I stood at the window. Pimple would no doubt have covered the six or seven miles twice every Sunday to prove himself Harriet's friend before she came to Netherleigh.

A basket-chair, comfortably cushioned, stood in the window-recess and I left the fire and went there, and a new sensation gripped hold of me.

I had some notion, of course, of home-sickness, because I loved my home and cosy attic so much that it was not difficult to realise what my feelings would be if I were taken away from them ; but the sickness that now seized me was for the common



life; for the delights of field-path, high-road and moorland: for the experiences which other people do not value because they have always had them.

The light and the landscape combined to allure me. It was a glorious day in May—a sparkling laughing day appropriate to the merry month. My window faces north-west, but it is built well out and has glass on three sides, so that it is a cheerful spot when the weather is fine. From it I had admired the view a thousand times, and I felt as I have said, a sort of proprietorship in it, but to-day it “pulled” me, and gave me a sense of lacking something.

There was a white highway, green-bordered as I could see, that led to Headley Bridge—a safe and pleasant road to-day, but at times, as I remembered, a road of tragedy; for it climbs high, and on the bleak, wind-swept moorland which it crosses many a countryman has been overtaken by death and has slept his last sleep amid the snow-drifts.

Below the road the trees were just bursting into leaf, for the season was late, but the strong sunlight caught the fresh tints and made them glitter like tinsel; it fell upon the pastures where the shadows were so black and plated them with silver; it sprinkled its beams upon the flooded river, and the river tossed them away as if it were too busy for such trifling. It was a sight to gladden eye and heart, and it had no limit on either hand until the hazy moors lost themselves in the soft colours of the horizon.

Netherleigh lies in the hollow under the shelter of the Bastion on whose slopes our house is built. It is an ancient market town of which we are all justly proud. We like to think that it figured in history, when blatant and bustling places like Airlee and

Broadbeck were among the waste places of the earth. Nowadays these cities empty some of their surplus population into our midst, and their retired merchants and manufacturers blot the landscape with red-tiled villas—perfect monstrosities from our point of view—but no native would mistake these intruders for Netherleigh folk. We have records which tell of our ancestors' doings as far back as the seventh century, and we boast that it was once a fortified place with a moated castle that has since disappeared, and a gallows-tree which has shared the same fate. It still has cobbled streets, though it hides them behind the principal thoroughfares; there are old hostels with mullioned windows and walls panelled in oak; narrow "ginnels," as we call the passages that lead from one court to another, and a quaint wooden-benched building that faces the open square where the cattle market is held.

Within the cool shades of our grey and venerable Parish Church, in its cloak of ivy, there are tombs of men whose deeds made them known and feared far beyond the confines of the county of broad acres. I always turn to the old church for comfort when my gaze rests on the hideous gas-works at the other side of the town. And my gaze, alas! is always resting on the gas-works and with strong disapproval. They are my *bête-noir*. I do not dispute that they have their use, but why cannot they be sunk into the earth instead of flaunting their ugliness above it.

All these things I can see for myself and have seen for centuries, but the inhabitants—what do I know of them beyond the little I have gathered from the conversation of my own people? As I looked from my window humanity began to pull as well as the country.



I told mother so when she came up to spend the afternoon with me. It is a dull day when mother is unable to give me two or three hours of her refreshing company. The burden of years and suffering have never, thank God, caused my affection for my mother to lose its freshness. The humour of it strikes me when I say that she is the queenliest and most lovable of women, for I know almost as little of women as of queens, and of them I know nothing. But the soul within me leaps at the sight of my mother ; and there is no other woman, and never can be for me.

She drew an easy chair into the window recess and sat down beside me, taking my hand in hers and said :  
“ Well, you goose, tell me what you are going to do.”

She spoke lightly, but she did not deceive me, and I was inclined to keep back part of what was in my mind. But you cannot do this with mother. She is too penetrating, and she soon knows all about it.

“ I’m not sure that I forgive Dr. Irving for unsettling you, Dick,” she said ; “ but if I was in your place I should feel just as you do.”

She saw that I was surprised as well as pleased, and she continued :

“ There’s a risk and a big risk, Dick. Dr. Irving admits that. You may not be able to stand it. Dr. Banks knows you well and he would say it was suicide. Suppose you die.”

“ That’s just what I’m afraid of,” I replied. It was not the answer she had expected, and I smiled.

“ A week ago I should have replied, ‘ What then ! Is life so desirable that I should fear to lay it down ? ’ I had my back turned to the stage and was reading the reports of plays that had been acted before my

time. But Irving turned me round and I see now the curtain behind which live men and women are waiting to perform before my eyes. And now I am afraid lest I should die before I have learned the meaning of the play. But better, mother mine, better see the first act than none at all, for the actors are flesh and blood and not the painted figures of a panorama. It's strange, though, that I should begin to be afraid of death only when I propose to risk my life."

"There's just one thing worries me, Dick. I wish you hadn't begun this thing on a Friday, and in May, of all months in the year."

I laughed aloud at that. Sensible as mother is, and in her way deeply religious, she is the unwilling prey to certain superstitions which live and thrive in these localities.

"Who's the goose now?" I inquired. "Mother, I'm ashamed of you!"

"I don't really believe there's anything in it, of course," she said; "but a good many people would think it unlucky, and we can't help being influenced a weeny bit, can we?"

"Of course we can," I said. "I could tell you all about the origin of these superstitions, but it wouldn't be any good, would it?"

"Well, never mind, Dick. We are in God's hands. I won't worry any more."

The sweet, fresh air of the moors came in at the window and fanned our cheeks.

"It's a beautiful world, Dick," mother said. "And this is a very beautiful corner of it. I haven't seen much of it myself since you came upon the stage, and it has been no trial to me. But nobody can take



away from me the scenes I looked upon in my youth. I travelled a good deal before I was your age, and during the last twenty-five years I have re-visited these places scores of times whilst I have sat and sewed. And you've never been anywhere. Poor old Dick!"

"Well, anyway, we won't start a League of Self-pity, will we?" I said. "I propose to travel now—first of all, as far as the drawing-room; eventually, perhaps, as far as Overburn. I feel within me the thrill of the explorer. I am going to discover what is on the other side of that hill."

"How are you going to get there?"

That was getting down to details, and we spent an hour or more in discussing ways and means. When we had drafted the measure to our own satisfaction we put it on one side until the evening when it would have to be submitted to the judgment of the Upper House. In our case Money Bills are not beyond the jurisdiction of the Upper House; in fact they depend entirely upon the kind of reception that is accorded them there.

The Upper House, however, was in a complaisant mood when the matter came up for discussion that evening. It stood with its back to the fire and settled things in the high-handed way that is common to Unquestioned Authority. As a business government, dad is without a rival.

"If you would only leave matters of this kind to me, my dear," he said, "you would save yourself a deal of trouble—and a deal of time. Not that time matters much in your case, of course. If you're going to try this mad scheme, and evidently you are, like a couple of ——" He hesitated, and mother smiled.

"Never mind," she said. "Just hop over the word, Richard, and begin again on the other side. We understand, Dick and I."

Dad took her advice. "I was about to say that seeing the thing has got to be done I shall see, of course, that it is done right."

"Like the man who said that if he had to die at any rate he'd be buried with ham," I interposed.

The interruption was not heeded.

"When you go downstairs you must not attempt to walk. Remember, I forbid that, for you know what Banks said, and Banks was no fool. You have the chair somewhere about and Hunt will take one end and that red-haired girl, what's her name, the other. She's likely enough. And when you go out, if it gets as far, you'll have to have a trap of some sort."

Mother and I exchanged glances.

"I was thinking of that governess car of Benson's," mother suggested. "He lends it out, I know."

"Oh, does he? Well, I hope he'll find hirers. But I'm not one of 'em, my dear. He'll not add me to his clients." Father was expanding and mellowing at the same time. "When Dick drives out he'll go in a trap of his own."

"Nonsense," said mother. "This is only an experiment. You wouldn't buy one, Richard."

"That's just what I would do, Mrs. Dallinger. It may be nonsense from a woman's point of view, which isn't the same as a business man's. Women take short views; they see just a little way beyond the end of their noses. You wouldn't have occupied the position you do occupy in this town, my dear, if your husband hadn't seen a little farther than that."

He smiled down upon her and she smiled up at him.

"No, my dear. Dick shall have a little pony carriage of his own—rubber tyres, good springs and all the rest of it. Something without doors that he can get in and out of easily; and a steady reliable pony to pull it."

"But the cost, Richard, for an experiment!" protested mother.

"That's the narrow vision of a woman, my dear. As I remarked before—but it's no use repeating myself. If the experiment *should* succeed, I should pay for that governess car of Benson's twice over and he'd have it. That's the subject from the business point of view, d'ye see? If I buy a trap, and the experiment turns out badly, I can sell it again. And if I don't know much I know at least how to buy and how to sell. You may thank your lucky stars you married a business man, Edith."



## CHAPTER IV

### IN WHICH PIMPLE TELLS HIS STORY

WHEN I mentioned the matter of Pimple's visit to mother I found that there were certain complications which I in my ignorance had not foreseen. It had seemed to me the simplest thing imaginable to ask Harriet's "friend" to spend an hour with me on a Sunday evening, but after a quarter-hour's instruction on the subject of "followers" I felt that I had been extremely rash, and I came very near to repentance. The question would have been simplified if Pimple had occupied the open and avowed position of a "young man," but it appeared that our household rules made no provision for matrimonial cadets ; and the working arrangement which Harriet evidently regarded as prudent was quite clearly disapproved of by her mistress.

I got my way in the end, but I have an uneasy feeling that Harriet was brought up on a charge of suspicious behaviour and was duly warned and admonished. At any rate her eyes were as red as her looks were blue when she brought up my lunch.

She had regained her spirits, however, when she knocked at my door on her way to bed.

"If you please, Miss Trichud," she said, "missus told me as you was up yet, an' Pimple says 'at 'e'll come to-morra night, an' thank you kindly. But if



you please will it do if 'e gets 'ere just afore eight ? ”

I hesitated, and Harriet proceeded confidentially :

“ 'E wouldn't ha' asked you, Miss Trichud, only it's t' Anniversary at their place to-morra, an' ther's a big man comin' from London or somewheer to preach for 'em. 'E's a vet., an' Pimple 'ud be disappointed to miss 'im.”

“ He's a what, Harriet ? ” I asked.

“ A vet. Same as Mr. Doidge i' t' Market Place.”

“ Oh, I see. Then Pimple is a dissenter ? ”

“ No, he's a Methody, is Pimple. 'E teaches in t' Sunda School, an' 'e 'eard this man last year. I forget what they call 'im. Ee, when I bethink me I have a bill i' my pocket.”

Her pocket was not very accessible, but the bill was eventually produced, and from it I learned that certain “ Trust Sermons ”—whatever they may be—were to be preached on the following day in the Wesleyan Church, Netherleigh, by the Rev. J. D. R. Robinson, D.D., of London.

“ But I thought you said the preacher was a vet., Harriet,” I remarked.

She nodded. “ So 'e is,” she said, “ it tells you by them letters at after 'is name.”

“ What do they signify ? ” I asked.

“ Dog Doctor,” she replied. “ I didn't know either, but I asked 'Melia's young man an' 'e said they stood for Dog Doctor ; an' 'Melia laughed at me 'cos o' my ignorance.”

I'm afraid I aroused Harriet's indignation by removing this misapprehension, but she is a good-natured girl, and I daresay 'Melia will get off lightly.

I consented to receive Pimple at the later hour and Harriet went away satisfied.

I believe I fell asleep quickly, but I woke about two o'clock with a start, and my heart, which had been quiescent since Irving's visit, began to play its old tricks. I knew exactly what to do, of course, and I managed to turn up the light and swallow the usual draught. Necessity and practice have made these movements almost automatic, but I introduced an innovation this time, though I marvel how I managed it.

A pear-shaped bell-push is always on the pillow at my right hand. At the first sign of an attack I press it and the loud alarm always brings instant help. I seized it instinctively this time, but one of those inward voices exclaimed authoritatively, No, No!

I was surprised, but I did not ring, though I lay motionless with the push held loosely between my finger and thumb for what must have been a couple of hours at least. And I am not ashamed to say that I yearned for companionship and the assurance of watchful love. It isn't easy to lie still and risk a lonely death; and attacks of this kind force one very close to the edge of the precipice.

I don't flatter myself that I was wise in resisting the impulse—probably I was foolish. But Irving's words had set me thinking and had made me determine to be master of myself. If I had not misread the meaning in the doctor's eyes he believed that I need not be the slave I had been to my own rebellious organs, and I had determined to assert myself. That was why some stern but friendly counsellor within said, "No, No," when I seized the bell-push.

I had to summon all my resources to my aid, how-

ever, but they were at any rate my own resources, and they did not fail me.

One of these, and perhaps the least worthy, was Pride. I knew exactly the kind of look I should see on dad's face within two minutes of that loud summons—the triumphant I-told-you-so look which peeps round the skirts of anxiety and pity and promises you a sermon if you survive the attack. I made up my mind to spare myself that experience as long as possible.

It was hard work, and my resolution almost gave way a score of times. The bit of sky I could see through my window was spangled with stars and I began to wonder if one of them was the next world, and how soon I should be there. It is remarkable what childish thoughts come dancing up the paths of the mind when one lies awake in the night. My watch was under my pillow, and its monotonous tick beat like a sledge-hammer on my brain. I had to remove it at last, though the effort needed a full half-hour's consideration, and when it was upon the table its thunder was not silenced.

I shivered a little, but I held back my thumb. "You've got to stick it this time," I said to myself; and after a while the tumult ceased.

I pleaded laziness and the Sabbath in the morning and lay still until the afternoon; but I told Irving about it when he called, and was surprised that he did not order me to remain in bed all day. Perhaps he took it for granted I should do so.

"The theory's all right," he said, when I told him of my experiences and reflections; "but you mustn't carry it too far. Use judgment. I'll come in a minute if you 'phone me; there are times, you know, when



you need an ally. However, you've got over it again, and there's no great harm done. All the same an hour is as much as you must give this young man to-night."

It ran to rather more than that as events turned out. Pimple appeared upon the scene a little after eight, breathless and apologetic. He explained that this particular preacher was in the habit of taking liberties with the clock; and that the wits of the place excused him on the ground that his mother had not "shortened" him early enough in his infancy.

I know so little of babies that I had to call for an interpretation of the humour, but Pimple managed it without confusion.

He impressed me favourably. He is a sturdy well-set-up young fellow, with a frank and engaging face which the pimple does not spoil. I knew he smoked, but he emphatically declined to do so in my presence.

His shyness soon wore off, and I found him, after ten minutes' conversation, a sensible, clear-headed man, with well-defined views and the power of expressing them crisply and without affectation. A thread of sadness ran through his voice.

Something that he said made me ask if he had been a soldier.

"I've served my term, sir," he said. "I ran away from 'ome the day I was eighteen and 'listed in the 'King's Own,' and I'd seven years with the colours. I've only been back a bit better nor twelve months."

"And now you are going in for mental drill?" I suggested.

"Meaning books and that?" he inquired. "Well, I've always had a taste for that sort o' thing, but not many chances o' following it up. I didn't run away

for adventure or 'cos I favoured a wild life. I ran away like a coward 'cos I couldn't bide to stop at 'ome."

I was leaning back in my chair watching him, and he bent forward and stretched out his hands to the blaze. He appeared to forget me for a moment or two.

"I 'aven't seen much active service, sir," he said at length; "we had a scrap or two in China, but it was nowt, an' I can 'onestly say 'at the only man I ever wanted to kill was my own father, an' I believe at t' bottom of me I want to kill 'im yet."

I remembered that Pimple was a Sunday School teacher and hinted as much.

"I know, sir," he replied. "I've said that to myself many a time. I've murdered 'im in my heart over an' over again, and accordin' to t' Bible that's as bad as if I'd put him under t' sod right; and I oft think I ought to give t' class up; but they're only little lads an' they're fond of me."

"Perhaps you wouldn't care to tell me about it," I said. "We'll change the conversation if you like. Have a look at my books."

"I'll tell you if you care to hear," he said, without moving his position. "You'll be the only man I ever did tell except the chaplain out yonder in 'Ong Kong when I was down with fever, an' I was too bad to remember much o' what he said."

He got up abruptly and went over to the bookshelves, standing with his back to me for a moment or two; and I thought once of asking him not to continue, but deferred to an inward voice that bade me be silent.

He came back to his chair after a while and spoke calmly.

It was a tragic and unusual story that he told me,

and it lost nothing of dramatic force in the telling. I believe Pimple forgot me altogether as he went back down the years and re-trod, step by step, a path that had become as hateful as it was familiar.

If I were to tell the story as he told it I could not reproduce its intensity ; I could not make the dull pages of my manuscript reflect the heat and passion of his voice, as in slow but unfaltering tones he disclosed his poisoned memories.

He had been born and brought up in a village which he would only designate as being " a fairish step from here," but which was small enough to make family secrets almost an impossibility—" a place where you couldn't hide nowt," as Pimple put it.

What his father's trade had been Pimple thought it best not to tell, but he had evidently been fairly prosperous, and so far as money was concerned they had been comfortable enough. There was a note of pride as well as of affection in the way in which he spoke of the good-sized cottage, with its great oak beams and substantial furniture, " as clean and bright as any in Yorkshire," which he had never seen since he left home, and which he vowed he would never see again if he lived to be a hundred.

But fixtures and furnishings do not make a home, and it was when he came to speak of his mother that I realised what had been the centre of attraction to Pimple, and as he spoke of her a softened light came into the man's eyes, and his voice lost its harshness for a moment. There had been only the three of them, and she had been a good wife to her husband and a good mother to her boy. " She went by her Bible an' lived up to it. No show an' no talk, but it was t' real thing for all that, an' everybody knew it ;



an' I daresay I should ha' turned out well enough, for she wasted a lot o' prayers over me, if it hadn't ha' been for that devil."

That was how the narrative proceeded—an alternation of gentle moods and savage outbursts, like the course of our own Wharfe, now flowing placidly along its broad bed; now pent in narrow channels and falling tumultuously over rough and jumbled rocks.

He mentioned his father with an aversion that amounted to loathing: a man, cold as an icicle, hard and unfeeling as flint—outwardly respectable, hard-working and abstemious, neither free with his money nor yet tight-fisted; who could swear a little when provoked, but ordinarily had himself under control. He was utterly destitute of religion, unless Pimple's passionate prejudices had blinded his judgment, and his heart was "nowt but a lump o' lead." "I've seen all sorts," said Pimple, with bitter emphasis; "both white an' yellow, but a more unfeeling an' cruel man I never have met."

They had got on well enough together until the mother's health had given way, and it had gradually become apparent that there was no chance of improvement. Boy-like, Pimple had become accustomed to the situation until the events of one never-to-be-forgotten night had shattered his serenity.

When he reached this point in his narrative Pimple paused and mechanically picked up the poker from the hearth and tightened his hand over it. Until he had finished he never relaxed his grip; and his brow tightened too.

I forgot where I was as he proceeded. My own room vanished and I stood in the shadows of the low kitchen, where the only light came from the blazing

fire, and silently witnessed the whole distressing tragedy.

It was vividly real to me, yet Pimple was quite unconscious that the intensity of his passion had made him an artist, and I did not realise it until later. I saw the mother, a woman of forty-six, worn with suffering, and maybe with sorrow that was hidden from her boy's eyes, knitting in her chair; I saw the boy bending low over a magazine in the firelight, not raising his head when his father came and took up his position on the hearth. Even now I could vow that I actually heard the man's voice as, speaking quite coolly and with his hands in his pockets, he told his wife that he was going to bring another woman to live in the house, and made it plain what place he designed her to occupy. He was apparently proud of his honesty.

Pimple had not understood him, but the man's meaning was not hidden from his wife, who no doubt recognised in it the approaching fulfilment of a previous incredible threat. She gave a great cry, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed "Oh, Jack, don't." I hear that cry now as I write, as Pimple had heard it for eight long years.

I do not wonder that the boy did not realise at first the cynical brutality of his father's words.

"You've no need to make a fuss about it, an' if you look at it t' right way it'll be a saving to you. She'll do t' work an' keep her mouth shut, an' I shall give it out 'at she's a relation come to help us 'cos you can hardly trail about. There's lots o' countries by what they tell me where it's t' regular thing; an' your Bible saints made no bones about it," he concluded with a sneer.

It was then that Pimple had grasped his meaning ; and looking into his face as he told the story I knew how his eyes had flashed as he had jumped up and faced his father with clenched fists. He had been, as he said, out of his head with rage, but his father was a big powerful man, who could have settled the lad with one hand, and he had just laughed and had not even troubled to remove his hands from his pockets, though his poor wife was moaning and rocking herself.

“The minute another woman comes here I go,” Pimple had shouted. “Please yourself,” his father had replied ; “but your hide ’ll suffer if I catch you making mischief.”

Again the picture rises before me. The heart-broken woman slowly rising from her chair and making the preparations for supper : the sullen boy : the callous, indifferent man ; and I feel the pity of it.

It was the last meal they ever took together. The mother never left her bed again, and this circumstance actually seemed to please her husband, who found in it an unexpectedly favourable pretext for bringing in another woman. I could not wonder that Pimple had called his father a devil.

The rest of the story is soon told. The woman came the very day Pimple was eighteen, and instead of the brazen-faced hussy he had expected, he saw a motherly-looking woman with a pleasant face apparently not much younger than his mother, and with no outward show of vice. He admitted it grudgingly, and it had remained a mystery to him.

As she came in Pimple picked up his cap and went out—went out on his birthday without kiss or farewell for his mother ; without a word to the woman or his father ; and he had never seen any of them since.



Poor Pimple ! when he told me that his mother died within a month of his leaving, two tears—just two—trickled down his cheeks and dried there. They were the tears of a strong man who felt that he had played a coward's part towards the mother who bore him, and who with her last breath had muttered his name.

I pitied him from my heart, but I understood him too. He had a few shillings in his pocket at the time, and he took train to Pontefract with the intention of looking up an aunt, but he never got to where she lived, for as he passed a recruiting station in that town the gaily-coloured posters attracted his notice, and he went straight in and enlisted. Two hours afterwards he thought of his mother and repented, but it was too late then.

He replaced the poker on the hearth, and for a while neither of us spoke.

“ And when your mother died your father married the other woman ? ” I inquired at length.

“ I neither know nor care,” he said. “ But you understand now, sir, why I want to kill him.”

He looked at me and compunction seized him. “ I'm awfully sorry,” he said, seeing my white face ; “ I'm afraid I've knocked you up, an' they warned me to be careful. I lose my wits at times, I think.”

I reassured him, but he was obviously distressed, so I switched the conversation on to Harriet, whereupon he brightened. He appeared to be very fond of the girl and was anxious to marry and settle down, but Harriet thought there was “ time enough.” I gathered that it was not his fault that he was only a “ friend.”

We spent the rest of the time talking about books, and when he went away he took with him *Sartor*

*Resartus* and Southey's *Life of Nelson*. They were his own choice, and I have hope of Pimple.

For some time after he had left I sat meditating. There was evidently plenty of tragedy in the world still, and in a life of larger liberty I might often encounter it. Had Irving reckoned on that, I wondered? Would my heart stand tragedy? I was becoming intensely interested in the experiment, and for the first time in my life really understood the emotions of Columbus when he set sail in his crazy craft from Palos and safety. I was Columbus, Irving had faith in my *Santa Maria*, and from my quiet attic as from another Palos I was setting forth on my adventurous quest. Before me stretched the wide expanse of the Unknown, and I felt that I was on the eve of great events.

## CHAPTER V

IN WHICH MOTHER IS "AT HOME" AND I MAKE THE  
ACQUAINTANCE OF MISS JANET

I HAVE been laughing to myself over my experiences of an "At Home." It was by accident and not of malice aforethought, and to be perfectly candid I was really annoyed when I found I had been trapped, though it was entirely due to my own forgetfulness.

I have, after the manner of men, always rather derided these social gatherings, and I have judged of the success or otherwise of my mother's "Days" by the number of choice and appetising dainties that have been sent up for my tea, these being in inverse proportion to the number of callers downstairs.

In our case the "Day" occurs once a month, and I cannot deny that it has sometimes proved a godsend to mother and, in smaller measure, to me. Topics of conversation, like one's underclothing, are apt to wear thin when one can't change them; and mother's freedom, though greater than mine, is after all not much more than that of a jailer, so that she has to rely on the contributions of other people when she cannot go out and gather for herself.

On this monthly occasion, then, our good-natured Netherleigh reapers bring in their sheaves of news, and leave a generous supply for the gleaner who can seldom



go forth to glean ; and so we pile up little by little quite a stack of knowledge concerning our neighbours and notabilities.

It may seem like affectation on my part to disclaim any great interest in all this, and no doubt I have been rather superior. But the reason is this—mother knew the people and I did not. They were flesh and blood to her ; they were nobodies to me, who had most likely never seen one of them. They all seemed so remote from my attic and my life ; so insignificant compared with the men and women with whom I spent my days. It appeared to me foolish to get excited because the rector had refused to sanction Mrs. Sadler's proposed raffle in aid of the curate's fund ; and the fact that the District Council had at last decided after a stormy debate, and only by the casting vote of the Chairman, to give their premises three coats of paint on the outside, quite failed to move me.

I see now that I was wrong. Mrs. Sadler and the District Council help to make up the life of to-day, and the life of to-day is not unimportant.

You realise all this when you come to mix with people. Men and women are interesting, as the samples I have seen prove. I am including Pimple in order to make a plural, because only one " caller " came within the range of my experience on this particular " Day," and this was Miss Janet.

It happened in this way. Mother's birthday fell on the second Tuesday in June, and I was determined to go downstairs for the afternoon. I had quite forgotten that the date synchronised with our " Day," and mother was too mischievous to enlighten me.

Hunt and Harriet carried me down, and the moment I saw the cake-baskets I realised the situation, and

was mad. But you cannot remain mad on a birthday occasion, so we arranged a compromise. I feel sure that mother had hoped to have me on show as a special attraction, and she was disappointed when I insisted on being hidden behind a palm in the conservatory ; though she gave way very gracefully, especially as the arrangement enabled her to sit beside me and slip at once into the drawing-room on the arrival of visitors.

She was kept busy, however, until half-past five, when she came up to me and heaved a mock sigh of relief.

“ Well,” she said, “ it’s been quite a rush, but all have been who owe me calls, so come along into the drawing-room, and I’ll tell you about it.”

I went, but the tale was not told ; and I certainly felt that guardian angels as such were much overrated when Miss Janet was announced five minutes later.

Escape was hopeless, so I reconciled myself, and all the more readily because Miss Janet was one of mother’s favourites. She had only been in the town a few years, and was chiefly distinguished, I understood, for simplicity and good works, both of which were said to be unlimited.

I had never seen her before, and therefore I meant to examine her closely, but all I have retained is a general impression of a quaint little woman, middle-aged, kindly and spectacled, in an old-fashioned get-up which for the life of me I could not describe.

I was discovered when the greetings were over.

“ Edith ! ” There were three notes of exclamation and a full stop after the word. “ It is not—it cannot be—and yet it must. Your son ! I fear I am intruding. I know I am <sup>very</sup> la——. Oh, how *do* you do,

Mr. Richard? I am very pleased to have the privilege. So unexpected, too. I have heard of you so often from your mother, and to think that to-day—. Thank you so much, Edith. Well, perhaps just for one moment. No tea, thank you, I really couldn't. I have had two cups already. Mrs. Fry and Miss Stephenson, you know. They are the same day, and you are all such a long way apart. Oh, dear, it is very tiring; but this is worth it; it is much more than worth it, dear, to see you and Mr. Richard."

She fluttered to a chair and folded her wings, but the chirping continued quite pleasantly.

"You see, dear, I remembered it was your birthday. I wouldn't have forgotten it for worlds, but then I couldn't because it is in my little red Birthday Book which I look into every morning after I have read my portion. The quotations are from Shakespeare, as I daresay you remember, because you wrote your name in yourself. It is beautiful handwriting, I do admire it, so firm and clear. Mr. Francis was looking through it one evening, and he remarked on how very clear and neat your mother's handwriting is, Mr. Richard. And he was struck with it because it isn't pointed like most of the other ladies'. Well, dear, as I was saying, I looked into it this morning—into the book, I mean—though I needn't have done so, because I know the lines by heart, and they are so wonderfully appropriate :

"'. . . She looks as clear  
As morning roses newly washed with dew.'

"Now isn't that pretty? And I remember remarking to Mr. Francis how appropriate the words were, and he said in his funny way, 'There are two lots. How do you know that this particular couplet applies



to Mrs. Dallinger ? ' Of course he only said it to tease me, because, you see, Mr. Richard, there are two quotations for each day, and the other one is not very nice. It says 'the empty vessel makes the greatest sound' ; and nobody could think of applying that to you, Edith. However, I was quite equal to him. I made him a little bow and said *that* quotation was for the males. I really must beg your pardon, Mr. Richard, for repeating this in your presence, but of course it was only my fun. Well, how are you, Edith ? "

I am sure that it was for my sake that mother produced her latest *chef d'œuvre*, and the little lady bent over the fancy-work and became for a time almost speechless. But only for a few moments ; then she bubbled over again.

" Edith ! it's lovely, and I know good work when I see it, dear, but then you do everything well. My eyes are not good enough for such fine work. Mrs. Dewhirst—Mrs. Alfred Dewhirst, I mean—bought a cloth at our Bazaar ; it was not a bit bigger, and she gave five pounds for it, and it wasn't to be compared with this. And by the way, dear, that reminds me. I don't know if you've heard, but Mrs. Denville—you remember Kitty Dewhirst married Mr. George Denville last summer ; changing the name, but not the letter, though I hope the rest of it won't come true—well——" Here Miss Janet became confused, coughed unnecessarily, and completed what she had to say with a motion of the lips and two or three significant nods.

A conversation in undertones followed, and only a few odd remarks came to the surface and floated to my ears. " Oh, yes, quite nicely ; both of them. A

boy. *Won't* his father be proud? It was Nurse Jackson; I met her as I came up. But"—the voice was raised again—"as I was saying about that cloth of Mrs. Dewhirst's, it wasn't to be mentioned in the same day with yours. It hadn't the work in it, and there were places where the pattern was not quite regular. Many people wouldn't have noticed it, but I soon see things of that kind. 'Set a thief——' you know! I often wish I didn't notice so much, because it doesn't seem kind to pick holes in other peoples' work."

"Never mind," I ~~said~~ said soothingly. "If it's like mother's there are so many holes in already that a few more won't matter."

"Now you are laughing at me, Mr. Richard. You men are so down upon us women. Of course when I said 'picking holes' I was speaking metaphorically. But then you knew that, of course you did, and I am sure I am very glad that you are well enough to laugh at me. I don't mind a bit, and it is so nice that you are able to come downstairs on your mother's birthday. And that reminds me that I said I wouldn't stop. No, Edith, I won't. I will not for anything. I know Mr. Richard would be horribly disappointed. Besides I must see to Mr. Francis's tea. Thank you ever so much but I must go."

She rose; shook hands with me; kissed mother again on both cheeks and turned to leave. She paused at the door, however, for a final outburst.

"Good-bye once more, dear," she said. "It always does me good to listen to you. Oh, by the way, I don't believe I wished you 'Many happy returns.' I am so forgetful, but I do so now, dear," and she kissed mother again. "And you won't mind my having

called you Edith so often, will you? I wouldn't have done it for anything if others had been present. Not for anything. I would have been most guarded, because in a place like this one cannot be too careful, I know. But we are such old friends, and it is such a pleasure to call one's intimate friends by their Christian names, and Mr. Richard will forgive me."

When mother came back she looked at me inquiringly.

"I'm all right," I said. "It's a whirlwind of a peculiar type—soft and from the south I should say. My head doesn't swim and the impression left is rather agreeable. But how does she make herself out to be such an old friend?"

"She is like you, Dick. She has an elastic calendar and lives in deeds, not years. We have known each other long enough to know all that matters; and she is one of the dearest girls I know."

"Girls?" I queried. "She must have been a girl a very long time."

"Ever since she was born," answered mother mockingly. "She is about my age, and I claim to be a girl still in spite of you. So what have you to say now, Impertinence?"

I said nothing for the moment because dad's step was heard in the hall and mother went to meet him, but I looked after her admiringly.

If she is not exactly slim she is tall and graceful, and I will not believe she is forty-seven. Though after all what is forty-seven? Then I brought up the mental image of Miss Janet and put it back again. "You have learned a secret which has not been revealed to the other girl," I said, as mother came in again.



Netherleigh dines in the middle of the day. There are exceptions, of course, but they are few and confined to "the County" and a sprinkling of professional men. The majority rather snorts at any neighbour who takes it into his head to dine in the evening, and looks upon him as "uppish" and approaching the condition that precedes a fall. Dad belongs to the class that snorts.

We continued to discuss Miss Janet, then, over the tea-table, and I received enlightenment from two quarters.

"I wish to goodness, Edith, you'd speak plain prose. Nothing vexes me more than these high-flowing, south-country, roundabout ways of putting things. Your mother can call him a 'paying guest' if she likes, but 'lodger' is shorter and means just the same thing. False pride, that's what it is. There were no 'paying guests' in Netherleigh until Miss Janet brought 'em from the South. It's veneer, nothing else; and north-country folk like the solid, genuine article.

"Why, it's only the other day old Crabtree was telling me, 'What do you think?' he said. 'Our Tom's been on his holidays, south coast somewhere, and he's come back and wants me to paint out "butcher" and put up "meat purveyor."' "Meat purveyor!" think o' that,' he said. 'But,' he said, 'I turned to him, and I says, "Look here, my lad I've *purveyed* the meat in that basket this morning Just you *survey* that cap o' yours and *convey* that meat where it belongs, and leave my sign alone and my bill-heads too.'"

Dad took another piece of crumpet, but his mouth was too full of scorn to accommodate material food, and he proceeded :

“ There’s Lorrimer’s, in Airlee, where I get my hair cut. As decent a barber as ever I met, and a fellow who used to have a bit o’ common-sense. He was a hairdresser up to a week ago, but I’ll bet you couldn’t guess in a month o’ Sundays what he is now. A ‘ tonsorial artist ’—yes he is. Has it splashed all over his window in ten shillings’ worth o’ gold leaf. I never saw it until he pointed it out as proud as Lucifer when I was coming away, and then I told him straight I wouldn’t have gone in if I’d seen it. And I wouldn’t. And it turned out to be south again. Some fool of a traveller who’d persuaded him he wasn’t up to date. Up to date ! We don’t need southerners to teach us to be up to date. Every man they have ’at’s worth his salt comes from the north, and they pay us back with ‘ tonsorial artists ’ and that sort of rot. I’m a plain machine-maker, thank God, but some south-country idiot ’ll come along one o’ these days, I’ll bet, and try to persuade me that I’m a purveyor of printing appliances, or something of the sort ; and I hope I’ve my thick boots on.”

“ Get on with your tea, Richard,” interrupted mother ; “ it’s going to be quite cold.”

Dad got on, and might have remained quiet to the end if I had not innocently inquired who Mr. Francis was. “ I don’t seem to know the name,” I remarked.

“ Of course you know it,” said dad ; “ only you don’t recognise it. He’s young Terry—Terry and Terry, solicitors. I’ll bet he’s nearer fifty than forty, but he’s always been Mr. Francis to his face and ‘ young Terry ’ to his back. Fault of having a father o’ the same name. It ’ud be just the same with us if you were about the town, only worse. You’d be ‘ Mr. Richard ’ when they knew you heard ’em, and

‘young Dick’ when they knew you didn’t. And I should be ‘old Dick.’ I never knew why he left his aunt and went to lodge with Miss Janet. Of course, he might have had other views. He couldn’t marry his aunt.”

“Richard! I’m ashamed of you. Talk about women and scandal! You’re outrageous.” Mother was genuinely indignant, but dad was unmoved.

“Don’t blame me. Sadler says his wife knows for a fact ’at they’re likely to make a match of it; but it’s no business of mine. I’m keeper to neither of ’em. But she’s got a funny taste in husbands if he’s hers.”

Mother would not discuss the subject and for a time there was silence. I occupied myself in thinking of Irving and his theory of risk, and in the mental arithmetic of trying to calculate the debt I owed him. But for him I should have missed a proper comprehension of dad just as I should have missed Pimple and his tragedy. I fell to wondering if after all Irving were not the modern incarnation of Aladdin’s wonderful lamp, and I had just worked back to the theory that the Open Sesame, the Lamp and Irving were a sort of Fairy Trinity when a remark of dad’s called me back to the dining-room and realities. He had settled down to his pipe, and said with some abruptness:

“I’ve bought your Lord Mayor’s Show to-day, Dick.”

We waited for more, knowing dad’s peculiarities.

He puffed away deliberately. Then:

“It’s as neat a little contrivance as you need wish for. I got it in Airlee; cheap too. It’s all motor-cars nowadays, and I’ve a notion they weren’t sorry to get rid of old stock.”



"I hope it isn't an old-fashioned thing," mother ventured.

"Do you indeed, my dear? I suppose you think I put a penny in the slot and drew it out in a lucky-packet! That's the estimate you've formed, no doubt, of your husband's business capacity. Well, I'm sorry to undeceive you, but I *bought* the trap, and that means that I examined it first. I mayn't know much but I do just know the difference between a pony-carriage and a Noah's Ark."

"I apologise," laughed mother; "but you called it a Lord Mayor's Show, you know, and that's only a week or two less diluvian."

Dad was willing to be appeased. "You'll see it for yourselves in a day or two," he said. "It's got to be rubbed up a bit, but it's nothing to be ashamed of. I wouldn't mind riding in it myself. And I've got Pegasus, too. That's the word, isn't it, Dick? Anyway it's just the pony for the job, and it's stabled down at the works at this minute."

We were on our guard this time, and the particulars our questions elicited were not salted with sarcasm. But there was a final revelation.

"Also, I've got a coachman."

This time caution was forgotten.

"A coachman! But, Richard, I thought Hunt would have driven. He's quite capable, and he has any amount of time."

"Just so, but Hunt doesn't happen to be my choice. Women never injure themselves with thinking too hard, but I'm a business man, and I look at these things from a practical point of view. Wise men study the road before they travel it. Suppose Dick's taken ill, what use would Hunt be? You want a

man with a head on—a steady, reliable, elderly man—for this job; one who won't fall to bits in an emergency. Hunt's right enough in his way, but he's always just round the corner when he's wanted. He's generally either 'just slipped in' or 'just slipped out'—'Hunt the slipper,' you might call him. You'll not improve on that, Dick, my boy, with all your wit."

Dad chuckled over this achievement for quite a time and fell into the best of humours.

"The fact is, Irving told me of the old fellow—I went to see him and talked it over. I got the pony from the old chap, too, and liked 'em both. He's quiet—the old man, I mean—no fool; and I know a fool when I see him, and I've seen plenty. They call him Sandy Parker."

"It's a name of good omen," I said. "Sancho Panza! We will journey forth together in search of adventures."

Now that dad was assisting I felt that Destiny was really busying itself with my affairs, and I could not help wondering what my heart was making of it all. Its sensations must be like those of a poor-spirited horse who hears weight after weight piled on the cart to which it is harnessed without anyone inquiring what are its views as to the amount it feels capable of hauling. I sympathised with my heart to some extent, but shuffled the responsibility on to Irving and dad, and refused to worry.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN WHICH I GO OUT "ON MY OWN"

I WAS now quite ready to share Harriet's openly-expressed opinion that I was getting along "like a house afire," but Irving shook his head when I proposed to start immediately upon my extramural adventures. He had been asking questions of my inside again and was reticent about the answers he had obtained.

"But it's so stuffy up here," I expostulated rather petulantly, "and my appetite for life is growing and must be satisfied."

"All in good time," he replied. "The room is full of air which blows fresh from the moors. It is cool and very pleasant by the open window, and I advise you to get into your dressing-gown and take things easy until afternoon, when you may go into the garden for an hour or two."

I muttered a protest which passed unheeded.

"As to your appetite for life—well, I'm glad it's growing, but plain food makes the best foundation and you needn't go seeking that. It'll come to you. You shall go after the nuts and blackberries by and by."

"I tell you what it is, doctor," I said. "I'm beginning to be a rebel against authority. It's your fault, for you started me, but now I'm off on my own and I want to go a bit faster."



"When things, once started, begin to go on their own, and the pace gets quicker, they are usually going downhill," he remarked dryly, "and that I want to avoid. At present there is a brake upon your impulses and it is best to apply it."

"You see," I said, "you gave me a pretty broad hint that I could control myself if I would, and I did so a week or two since without any ill results. Pimple's visit didn't do me any harm—on the contrary it did me good. And I've been reading up the subject and I don't see why I shouldn't cure myself. It's time my will got the mastery. All this coddling has made me a slave to habit, and I'm going to emancipate myself. Why should I be the victim of anything so paltry as a defective valve? I've given this rotten old heart of mine due and formal notice that it's got to hand over the keys and understand that I'm going to run the show myself."

He looked fixedly at me, and there was a faint smile at the corners of his lips. "Very good," he said. "But don't read rubbish of the pseudo-scientific sort, and don't exchange the slavery of habit for that of impulse. Men who have been in bondage for a long time often make rash use of their freedom. Don't put that heart of yours into chains and try to force it to work hard, or there'll be trouble. Act reasonably as well as firmly, and it will do what it can for you, as a friend. But bear in mind, it really is out of sorts and must not be driven. It's your own parable."

He departed, and although I had no intention of disobeying him, yet disobey him I did. I was carried down into the garden in the afternoon, and was for a while content to sit with a book upon my knee in the

brilliant sunshine. Mother stood it as long as she could, but the heat gave her a headache and she retired indoors.

It was when I was left alone that the spirit of adventure awoke in me, and assumed control. I might have resisted, but when one is hungry one goes in search of food, and I was hungry for life and inclined to explore. I rose and looked guiltily towards the house, and I admit I felt something of the bold and naughty recklessness of the Knave of Hearts as I walked slowly across the lawn to the gates of our garden and then sauntered down the road a little way in order to see if there were any tarts worth stealing in that part of the world's pantry.

Instead of turning into the lane, where I might have been observed by mother or one of the maids, I kept to the highroad that runs past the side of the house and leads to the town. A cool breeze was blowing and there was more dust than was agreeable, but I hardly noticed this at first because I was momentarily expecting to be discovered and recalled. My spirits were high, and I determined to ignore the commotion that was taking place underneath my waistcoat.

The few people who passed stared curiously, for I was, of course, a complete stranger to them, but no one accosted me, and when I reached the fork in the road where the streets begin I was inclined to turn back, partly because the cupboard in this direction appeared to be bare, and more because prudence reminded me that a hundred yards of hill separated me from home. The providence that watches over Knaves as well as others, however, interposed at this point, and somewhat knavishly.

Curiosity led me to look round the corner along

the Airlee road, and I at once saw that the community of the neighbourhood was in a state of unusual excitement. Women were at every door, and a group of them, mostly with young children in their arms, stood at a respectable distance from the *fons et origo* of the disturbance—a dancing bear in charge of a couple of men attired in a sort of Tyrolese costume.

I leaned against the wall of a house and envied the youngsters who could run close up to the object of interest, which was some little distance away.

Irving would, I daresay, have expressed sarcastic astonishment that one who had doubtless taken his part in the games and attractions of the Roman Circus should stand rooted to the ground because a bear was clumsily performing in the street. It was so, however, and I must have had my mouth as wide open as a child's, for when a swirl of white dust had passed I choked and coughed in a way that alarmed me and drove the bear and its antics out of my mind.

Another cloud of dust approached and I stepped involuntarily into the open doorway of the house against which I had been leaning, and was at once greeted heartily by a voice whose owner I was too blinded to see.

The exertion had been too much for me, and though I did not actually lose consciousness, I have only a very indistinct recollection of being helped to a bench, and a mug of water pressed to my lips. When I had drunk I felt better, and my new acquaintance took his arm from about my neck and stepped back a pace or two.

I saw that I was in a cobbler's shop and that the cobbler himself was facing me. I must have alarmed him or he may have been working unusually hard—



at any rate he wiped his brow with a movement of his shirt sleeve that transferred a little honest dirt to the place where the honest sweat had been.

What he wore in addition to a jagged leathern apron I do not remember, for there was that about his face that prevented me from dwelling on the details of his dress. His right eye was tightly closed, and it was evident that he had lost the use of it, but the other blinked and flashed in a way that was at once attractive and disconcerting, and I am much mistaken if it allows its owner to miss much of what is going on.

He was clean-shaven and hollow-cheeked ; muscular though somewhat spare, and probably nearer forty than thirty. Nature had given him a crop of very light, sandy hair, but no eyebrows, so that it might almost be said that she had not only forgotten to dot one " i " but had also omitted to cross his " t's."

The look of anxiety left his face as I smiled and reassured him, and I judged it best to be confidential and so told him as much as was necessary.

" Well," he said, " I guess I wouldn't be in your shoes when the old lady catches you."

The idea of mother as an old lady amused me so much that I laughed aloud, and being convinced by this action that all immediate danger was past, my companion retired to a low bench and picked up his work again. He continued to shake his head, however, with a mournful expression that convinced me he was dwelling upon my fate with no slight commiseration.

I believe I should have thanked him and gone, but I felt that it would be unkind to leave him in distress, so I remarked that he seemed to be afraid of women.

His eye twinkled, as he turned it upon me again—I would have said he winked, but who can be sure that a wink is a wink when a man has only one eye? He gave a half-hearted laugh.

“Well, I’ll go as far as this,” he replied; “if women keep out o’ my way I shan’t fret myself off my food, shall I, Grimshaw?”

To emphasise the inquiry he picked up a child’s shoe and flung it at an old man who was sitting a yard or two away, hard at work upon the sole of a boot, and who had never once raised his head so far as I had seen, or taken the slightest interest in any other proceedings than those that directly concerned himself. He made now a gesture of annoyance but did not speak.

His companion’s surliness seemed to set free the cobbler’s vivacity, and I began to wonder if I had come across a humorist.

“He has one of his own at home, Grimshaw has, haven’t you, old bird? Reason he’s so quiet here, he spends his time thinkin’ what nice things he’ll say to her when he gets back at night. Woman, lovely woman!” He pronounced the word “luv’ly” and dwelt upon it with mock affection.

I fear my mouth must have been open again, for when he glanced at me he burst out laughing and began to sing in a loud but not unpleasant voice:

“She comes from—well, I won’t say where  
To homes that might be happy;  
She nags you till you cannot bear  
And makes you cross and snappy.

“In thirty ways she drives you mad  
With endless silly chatter,  
From early morn to night, my lad,  
It’s natter, natter, natter.”

My self-control must have deserted me and my face exhibited blank amazement. I recognised the parody, of course, but the tune was certainly borrowed from a hymn-book, and rather strained the metre, and it was drawled out with a studied mournfulness which ended in a roar of laughter. I began to suspect that my good Samaritan was a little mad.

"That's a bit o' my own," he explained; "home-brewed and plenty more i' the barrel. I hammer out another verse or two when I'm hammerin' t' leather, don't I, Grimshaw?" He evidently did not scruple to mix his metaphors, but nobody minded.

I hinted that his dislike of women was a pretence, but this he repudiated.

"I can't abide 'em," he said; "they natter so"; and he again lifted up a mournful voice:

"She natters, natters when she's wed,  
She natters when she's single;  
She natters when she's laid i' bed  
Or sittin' by the ingle."

"It took me hours," he broke off to explain, "to find a rhyme to 'single' that 'ud fit in with my ideas. Do you know what an 'ingle' is?"

He was manifestly disappointed that I did, so to encourage him I asked if he had had much experience of women.

"If I haven't, who has?" he replied. "I was t' youngest o' thirteen and t' other twelve was lasses. Twelve! Think o' that, and all ages and sizes, and all natterers! My father was as proud as Lucifer when I come. He said he'd crossed the Alps at last, and so he called me Hannibal, but my mother called



me Bill for short. Eh, it was a life, that was." Again he sang, but with a change of tune this time :

" She shrieks, she shouts, she growls, she groans,  
She looks as black as thunder,  
Her husband swears in undertones,  
And wishes her down under.

" But still goes on that endless flow  
Without the least endeavour.  
For men may come and men may go,  
But she goes on for ever."

I laughed aloud and rose, and seeing this the cobbler threw down his tools and rose too.

" Hannibal Wood, sir," he said, " at your service any time. Cobbler and——"

" Misogynist," I added, as there had been a sufficient pause.

He looked puzzled.

" Mi—— ? " he asked.

I repeated the word and explained its meaning, but he had a difficulty in pronouncing it until I wrote it down for him on a piece of leather.

" That goes on to a bill in t' window," he said, chuckling. " We'll have a bit o' fun with that."

Would it be believed that I got back home without my absence having been observed? Hannibal commandeered a passing milk-cart, in which undignified conveyance I was carried to my very gate, and mother was just waking from a sound sleep when I entered the house.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN WHICH NORMAN CYRIL STAFFORD UNCEREMONIOUSLY INTRODUCES HIMSELF

I SAID nothing about my adventure though I very badly wanted to do so, and as the tarts I had stolen did not belong to the Queen of Hearts that lady did not miss them. If I were asked whether I was any the worse for my experiences I should have to answer guardedly. No doubt the Knave of Hearts was both the better and the worse for his escapade—I mean, of course, apart from all moral considerations. I do not doubt that in his case as in mine the stolen food was good at the time and left an agreeable taste in the mouth, and if afterwards he had to endure pains in that part of the body where the heart is supposed to sink in times of panic, he very likely decided that the one sensation fairly balanced the other. That, at any rate, is what I felt when my heart, without leaving its place, went riotous during the night.

Irving did not call the following day, and I refused to yield to my inclinations, which would have kept me in my own room, and I had myself again carried down after dinner into the garden and the sunshine.

Once more I was left alone, for mother had household duties of some kind to attend to, and she thought that the previous afternoon's experiment had been quite successful.

Ours is not a large garden, but it has a fair-sized lawn bordered with gay flowers, and screened by trees. The trees conceal not only the roadway beyond them, but practically the whole of the town, so that I seemed to be seated in the very lap of nature and very near to her heart. How fair, how very fair and beautiful she looked ! The fields were yellow with buttercups, and in the strong sunlight the sloping hills in the half circle disclosed to me appeared to be carpeted with gold.

The trees were white in the dazzling sunlight ; in some places mere blotches of silver ; in others picked out and spangled where the foliage was less thick and the outstretched branches caught the sun's rays as they fell and tossed them from leaf to leaf.

The golden meadows ended with the middle distance, and on the steep hill sides above and beyond Romanton the greys and the greens predominated, made soft and delicate by the soft blue haze that spread over them, and that deepened into purple when the moors and the horizon were reached. Over all, a sky that was blue, but not intensely blue, because the very flimsiest veil of cloud had been drawn across it.

I had no eyes for my book ; I was glad to lie back in my chair and absorb the landscape.

A faint tinkling sound caused me to turn my head at last, and I almost started on seeing a little boy standing at my side and looking up inquiringly into my eyes. He was without hat, and a mass of fair and very curly hair covered his head. He was neatly dressed in a blue sailor suit with white braid upon the collar, and from beneath this a thick white cord peeped out and curved round into a pocket which no doubt concealed a whistle. In his left hand he held a large dinner bell. He was not at all abashed at



being discovered, and nothing but interest and curiosity filled his deep, thoughtful eyes.

"Why did you look like that?" he asked, rather slowly, as if words were tricky things that had to be treated with respect. There was a note of refinement in his voice that was very pleasing.

"Oh, I say," I began. "I think I ought to ask questions. How did you come into my garden?"

"Fwoo the gate," he replied. He had a little difficulty with some of his consonants, and particularly with his "r"s and "l"s, which helped to make his speech attractive.

He could not really say "the" and "that," but I cannot find any letters that represent what he did say, so I let them stand.

"It was open, and I fought I should like to see what was yound the co'ner. So I just came."

"I see. And you saw me?"

"Yes, but the ve'y first fmg that I saw was the daisies, and afte'wa'ds I saw you." He looked meaningly at the daisies, I thought.

The fact that there were any daisies there at all was another evidence, I fear, of Hunt-the-slipper-ism, but I was soon to find that my new acquaintance would not have counted this to Hunt for unrighteousness.

"Well, now that you have seen me and the daisies will you tell me what they call you?" I asked.

"Nawman Cy'il Stafford," he replied, managing to get the "r" into his surname by what was manifestly a trained effort, "and I'm four years old."

"Really," I said; "that's a great age. What does it feel like to be so old?"

He looked at me soberly. "It feels as if it would be ve'y nice to pyuck the daisies."

"Off you go, then. But put the bell down. What did you bring it for?"

The child fixed his eyes upon it as if he thought the bell, having a tongue, might answer for itself. Then he looked up and a merry smile lit up his face.

"I didn't bring it for anyfing. It was in the hall, and it just came with me. It makes a big noise. Would you like to hear what a big noise it makes?"

I declined this entertainment and the child did not press the matter, but was content to leave the bell in my charge whilst he gathered the flowers. He made slow progress and I called him to me and asked him why.

"Don't the pwetty little daisies mind being pyucked?" he inquired thoughtfully.

"No," I answered; "they like soft little fingers to pluck them, because if they are left, a big giant whose name is Hunt comes along with sharp blades that go round and round, and cuts them all down in a few minutes."

He nestled against my knee and I ran my fingers through his curls. After thinking deeply for a minute he said—"All the same, I don't fink I'll pyuck any more daisies because they die."

"But they come up again," I said.

He considered this for a few seconds and then asked:

"Do the daisies go to heaven when they die, and do they send little baby daisies down to live in their houses?"

He was getting me into deep waters, so I attempted to create a diversion by offering to tell him a story.

"Will it be about a twain?" he asked.

"A twain?" I inquired: "what is a twain?"

"A twain with an engine and ca'iages."

"Oh, I see. A train. Yes, if you like."

He came between my knees now and leaned his head in the hollow of my arm, and the mummy in me shrivelled appreciably.

As often as I finished the tale he said, "Again," and when he must have known it by heart he inquired.

"I say, do I call you uncle?"

"Oh, certainly," I replied; "honorary, you understand."

"Then, Uncle Onry, may I come fwoo the gate another day, and will you tell me some more sto'ies about twains?"

I gave the permission and the promise with more eagerness than the child would understand—with more than I understood myself—and he gently disengaged himself from my knees.

"I must go now," he said, "or pe'whaps mover will fink that somebody has wun away with me. Do you fink mover will fink that somebody has wun away with me?"

It was a serious question and it was asked seriously, and when I reluctantly gave an affirmative answer the Little Chap picked up the bell and ran across the lawn. He stopped at the corner to wave his hand, and then came back a few paces and called out:

"Uncle Onry, I should like you to hear what a big noise my bell makes."

Without waiting for my consent he proceeded to demonstrate the bell's powers; and as he disappeared round the shrubs, mother, Simpson and Harriet came flying from the house.

That night my brave professions of self-mastery fell to the ground with a bang. I felt unusually tired after



the Little Chap had gone and rather depressed, and I was not only glad to go back to my room before tea, but I undressed and went to bed before the sun was low in the sky. I told myself that it was merely a precautionary measure, and that I should be up betimes in the morning in quest of new experiences ; but I was merely whistling to keep my courage up. I knew the symptoms, and my teeth chattered a little as I gulped down a dose of medicine from the " A " bottle. " I won't yield, anyway," I said stubbornly.

Nobody suspected that there was anything wrong, not even mother, for I managed to play my part. If a battle had to be fought I was determined that it should be again without aid from the outside ; and I was glad when the light went out on the landing and I knew that I should be undisturbed.

Then, as I lay motionless, my heart and I came to close grips, and I struggled resolutely for an hour or more. It was no new experience, and I had no delusions as to the severity of the attack ; but having persuaded myself that mind was superior to matter I was determined to win. The Jennings strain, I suppose, began to show itself, and I said again and again, " I won't give in if it kills me."

But I did, though I am sincere in the belief that I should not have done so but for one consideration. I thought it all out ; I measured the risk, and faced the consequences, and was not moved from my purpose.

Then, all at once, a little voice spoke in my ear : " Uncle Onry, will you tell me some more sto'ies about twains ? " and a film spread over my eyes : an urgent desire to live swept my resolution from its feet, and I groped frantically for the bell and sent out a loud appeal for help.

## CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH I RECOVER FROM A SEVERE ATTACK AND  
THE LITTLE CHAP TELLS ME A STORY

THE doctor sat by my side all through the night and did what man could do to help me. Except when he had to use it his hand lay lightly upon my wrist, and after a time the idea was born in me that it formed a bridge over which his strength passed to reinforce my weakness.

I was too ill to think clearly, however, and my mind wandered uncontrolled along all kinds of pleasant by-ways, which had the unpleasant peculiarity of ending in thickets that became mazes, or swamps from which there seemed no escape. By and by it emerged upon the broad highroad across the valley that led over the hill to the land of mystery; and as it progressed towards the summit I realised that at length I was to know what lay beyond. I expected moorland, with here and there a farm or tiny hamlet.

It was summer-time and the sun was high in the heavens, but as I reached the brow of the hill I felt the air grow cold and ever colder, and I shivered. Then at last I stood upon the top and gazed in front of me with interest too feeble for the name of wonder. I was on the very edge of a lake whose waters were still and clear as glass. There was no ripple even on its margin, and its extent was hidden by a screen

of cloud that hung like a thick white curtain from the blue sky.

So close to me that I could have leaped into his skiff a boatman sat, holding his oars upright in the air, and though the stern of the boat was towards me and the man's eyes were on my face, both man and boat were motionless. But my mind ran on a pace or two and called to me that the vacant seat was mine.

I stepped forward, not eagerly nor yet reluctantly ; or rather I would have done so, but I felt a little tug upon my coat—a hesitating touch upon my arm ; and I turned and saw two deep pleading eyes which said with mute distinctness : “ Uncle Onry, you promised to tell me some more stor’ies about twains ” ; and I turned away from the boatman, and we went back down the white highroad together—the Little Chap and I.

The doctor had persuaded mother and dad to lie down, and they had gone to their room on conditions, but mother was dressed and at my side again before the pink of early dawn had spread over the sky ; and I was able to smile upon her, though the effort to turn my head was beyond me.

“ So Dr. Irving has pulled you round, Dick,” she said, as she bent to kiss me.

“ Yes,” I replied, “ he’s a good sort ; but I’m wondering if the pull would have been strong enough if he hadn’t had help.”

Mother looked surprised : I couldn’t see the doctor’s face.

“ Who helped him ? ” she asked.

“ Norman Cyril Stafford,” I answered ; but explanation was deferred.

“ Did you come and listen on the landing occasionally ? ” the doctor inquired, and mother answered :



"No, indeed. You promised to call us if it was necessary. Why do you ask?"

"I wondered; that was all," he replied.

I not only wondered; I investigated. It was during the afternoon when mother had gone downstairs for a time and Harriet had taken her place.

"I didn't mean no 'arm, Miss Trichud; but I knew it must be one o' your bad girds, an' I couldn't sleep a wink. So I just popped out o' bed once or twice an' listened to 'ear if you was all right. An' I didn't think my bare feet 'ud ha' made any noise, but dry boards is like cats—they squeak 'owever pratly you tread on 'em."

"But didn't you disturb Simpson?"

"'Er! T' Last Trump, as t' sayin' is, wouldn't wake 'er while she's 'ad 'er sleep."

I was in bed one full week and on my couch the better part of another, but I did not mind. I was no longer a rebel against circumstances, though I had not again become their slave. On the contrary I was determined to live my life worthily if I could, and I tried to think it all out so that I might be fortified against disappointment and mishap. I was not so sure now that I could control my heart and make it do my bidding; at any rate not immediately. It had mastered me once more and thrown me down upon my back at the very moment that life was opening out to me its attractions. But I had no regrets, for I had refreshed my soul at the fountain of reality, and the draught had been sweet. For the time books ceased to interest me much, because I had felt the touch and the warm, sweet breath of humanity.

I spent my time of quiet on a riddle—the riddle. Hitherto the riddle of life had been a subject in

philosophy : now it presented itself as a problem that I must solve for myself.

Sooner or later I knew that I should have to tread that white highroad and take my seat in the boat and be rowed beyond the cloud, but not, I hoped, before I had learned why my feet had ever been set upon the road. Weak as my body was, placing me at a grievous disadvantage as it would seem compared with the mass of men, I realised that I had still some relation to the universe, and that the duty was laid upon me to find out what it was. Many a time in the days which now seemed so remote I had said to myself that the Buddha was right, and that "the best of all were not to be"; but that was before I knew Pimple and the Little Chap.

I lay upon my couch and mused on these things, and all nature helped me, for it was a glorious month, this month of June. My windows were wide open, and through them there came sounds and visions that gladdened my heart and fed my thoughts. I never knew before what unembellished truth there was in the poetic rhapsody that speaks of the mountains and hills breaking forth before you into singing, and the trees of the field clapping their hands. Those before me sang and clapped their loudest for a week, and they made me join in the chorus. Away across the valley haymaking was going on, and it pleased my fancy to think that the men and women were singing to the swish of the scythe and the throw of the fork. The birds at any rate were tuneful, and friendly, also, for the sparrows came again and again and perched upon the window-sill and even hopped a little way inside; not cheekily, but with heads bent over as if to inquire how their big helpless brother

upon the couch was getting on. Every morning a thrush came and sang matins for me without fee of my paying; unless indeed the wireless currents of the air conveyed to him the thanks I felt.

I suppose the hills and the birds had sung for me before, but I was like one who had been deaf and blind and now heard and saw for the first time. And nature called for me; called peremptorily; bade me come out and take my place and play my part; and I answered "wait awhile until the signal comes decisively, and I will be with you."

For it came quite clearly to me at last that Irving was right, and I had no business to lie still like a fallen tree that rots because it is always absorbing and never giving back. I was a part of the universe, but I was more; I was a part of the throbbing life of the world. Frail and faulty as my body was it could yet do something for a time—for how long was not my concern. I could contribute a little, at least, to the life of those around me and so live myself. Endeavouring to save my life I had been losing it. Henceforth I would live if only to help Pimple, and to tell the Little Chap another story about a "twain."

And to my surprise and delight I found that the boy lived quite close to me. His parents have rented the end "cottage," as Irving calls it; and looking out of my window one day when I had found my feet again I saw the Little Chap playing on a strip of grass that borders the long yard.

I could not attract his attention at first, but I twisted a towel into a loose knot and threw it out of the window, meaning it to drop at his feet. Unfortunately the knot came undone and the towel floated away and rested on an elder-tree, where it



spread itself out as though it had misunderstood my purpose and thought I wanted to bleach it.

The tree, however, was low, and the white apparition attracted the Little Chap's notice. He gazed at it wonderingly for a moment, and then looking up to see whence it might have come, discovered me. He did not recognise me at first, and my voice was feeble, I fear, but when he did he danced up and down the grass, waving his hands and calling loudly, "Uncle Onry! Uncle Onry! won't you come into the ga'den?"

Then a lady came to the door, evidently inquiring what all the noise was about; but the boy was too excited to be still, and he ran up to her shouting, "Mover, mover, I want Uncle Onry to come down into the ga'den."

My first impulse was to draw my head in, for I did not know what sort of sight I looked in my dressing-gown and with ruffled hair; and though the girl was married she was still a girl, and a very attractive one, too; and even a mummy, when it feels within it the thrill of returning life, would like to look its best in the eyes of a pretty girl.

But I was too late, and in any case it was of no consequence, for after one brief glance upwards the lady was careful to keep her eyes down; so that I don't suppose she took in the details.

At my request mother went round to call on Mrs. Stafford, and before she had been there very long Harriet brought the Little Chap up for just ten minutes; and then went to rescue my towel with the help of a pair of steps and a clothes-prop.

Norman was eager to watch this operation, and we went over to the window.

"Do you fink the lady will be able to yeach the towel?" he inquired anxiously.

I explained that the lady's name was Harriet, and that the task was probably not beyond her powers.

"I wonder if the towel is cwyng because it has been caught by the twee. Do you fink it is cwyng, Uncle Onry?"

"Not a bit of it," I said. "It's laughing at me all the time. It went there to tease me, and it thinks it's good fun."

A smile began in the Little Chap's eyes and spread over his face. "The towel is having a good joke with you, isn't it?" he said, and I agreed that it was.

"Pewhaps it will not laugh any more when Ha'iet pokes it with the clo'es-pwop," he continued gleefully; and as Harriet at that moment did poke it with the clothes-prop and bore it away in triumph further speculation ceased.

He nestled very close to me on the couch whilst I told him another story about a train. I had thought out this story very carefully and he listened with minutest attention, and insisted upon a first and second repetition before he was satisfied.

My ignorance was made manifest on one or two points, however, but he let me down very gently when he discovered that I did not know much about "dwiv-ing-wheels" and the difference between a goods and an express engine. With a view to concealing any further lack of knowledge on my part I invited him to tell me a story.

He complied at once, and I learned more about "twains" in the space of five minutes than any engineering journal could teach me in five years.

The engines which figured in this romantic history

were gifted with powers of speech and reflection, not so mature, perhaps, but quite as remarkable as those possessed by Æsop's animals. They travelled where they would regardless of the laws of man or nature. There were collisions innumerable, but they somehow readjusted themselves and moralised upon the last accident as they ran forward to the next. I have tried to write the story down but have failed miserably. You have to see the serious look in the Little Chap's eyes as he narrates impossible adventures which are as real to him as the earth and sky. You have to hear the long-drawn-out "well then, you know," as he gropes along the keyboard of his imagination for the next notes of his fantasia. You have to watch the solemn little face grow still more solemn as the climax is reached; and the ripple that breaks over his cheeks and the sparkle that dances in his eyes as he triumphantly concludes, "so that's all, Uncle Onry."

Mother heard the last sentence or two and she caught him up in her arms and kissed him, and carried him downstairs, not without protest on his part.

As for me, I lay back and thought of what I had heard. And it is true that neither the *Arabian Nights*, nor the *Humours of the Giants*, nor the *Idylls of the King*, had ever interested me as much or given me as many thrills of pleasure as the Little Chap's "sto'y about a twain."



## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH I SET OUT ON MY ADVENTURES AND OVERTAKE A MAN AND A PIG

I HAVE waited and things have come to me. It is perhaps easier for me than for most people to possess my soul in patience, but I cannot deny that the hours dragged a little as one smiling day succeeded another, each pressing upon me its invitation to sally forth and taste its delights, and permission to do so was withheld. Irving can be as firm and unreasonable as old Banks himself, but though I told him so with much force I did not move him.

"You're not even a decent homœopathist," I complained; "and there's no sin worse than inconsistency in a medico. You recommended me to take large doses of life, and now you remove the bottle when I've only had two or three tiny pilules."

"Nothing of the sort," he replied. "You're not satisfied with pilules. You want to swallow the whole dispensary. There's always the Harriet mixture, you know."

"Harriet," I said, "is merely a tonic. She is a sauce, not a meal. She stimulates my appetite; makes me hungry for more. My soul cannot live on Harriet alone."

"You don't know what your soul can do," he retorted. "I wish the parts of you we can get at

were in as good condition. As they are not, your soul can afford to wait a bit, till things get equalised."

When at last the embargo was removed there came three days of wet weather. I do not deny that the country needed it; that it rejoiced the hearts of the farmers and eased the labours of Hunt, but it "rained me off" for another week, so that July had half spent itself before I gained the freedom of the countryside.

To relieve the tedium mother brought up Miss Janet for a few minutes one afternoon, and her approach was heralded by voluble protests conveyed to my ears by way of the open door in subdued but penetrating tones.

"But the damp, dear; . . . I was thinking that perhaps my skirt—You see it is such a fine rain that you cannot properly protect—Oh, of course, I had my waterproof—how silly of me! I hope Mr. Richard won't think—You are sure he won't mind, Edith?"

Happy and apologetic, Miss Janet followed mother into the room on tip-toe, and was obviously relieved to find me a stage or two beyond the semi-conscious.

"Oh, what a delightful room, Mr. Richard!" she ejaculated; "an ideal room for an invalid. Though indeed you are looking so well—such a colour, too, that we shall have to give up calling you that. But really, Edith, this is lovely."

It is undoubtedly a very decent prison-house, this of mine; and it amused me to see how her glances went round it, curiosity arm-in-arm with apprehension, as though she realised that there might be things in a man's sanctum which the unlicensed eyes of the other sex must pretend not to see.

"And it is so nice to be removed from all the household bustle—it must——"

I shook my head. "The mountain comes to Mahomet, Miss Janet. The maid, the mop and the mat invade my silent cell."

Miss Janet clasped her hands and turned to mother.

"Edith, I do envy you this! And it seems to come so easily to him, doesn't it? Quite like poetry; 'the maid, the mat and the mop,' and 'my silent cell.' It is *very* clever."

I hope I didn't look as foolish as I felt. One of mother's eyes drooped in my direction, I thought, and I tried to restore myself by falling into the commonplace.

"I don't mean to convey the impression that Harriet makes a noise," I said. "Harriet is a thoughtful sort and studies my comfort in every way."

"Oh, I am sure she will," assented Miss Janet, who was manifestly ready to think well of everybody. "She has a pleasant, sensible face, and of course any maid who had a heart at all would do her best for you. Still, Harriet does look very good-natured, and I am sure, Edith, they are very hard to get. Mrs.—"

It was maybe rude of mother to chip in at this point, but perhaps she did not notice that Miss Janet had not got to the end of her needle.

"Harriet would do anything for Dick, I believe," she said. "Why, do you know on the night of his last attack, when Dr. Irving never left his side, that girl got up several times and stood on the landing in her nightdress to listen if all was right. Dick asked her, and she admitted it."

"But——" Miss Janet paused and chose her words. "It was very nice in her, dear; very nice indeed. But she didn't—you don't mean to say that she told Mr. Richard that she came on to the landing in her—"



I mean that she actually mentioned her *robe-de-nuit* ? ”

Miss Janet struggled hard, but the pink flush covered her face.

I reassured her.

“ Harriet’s education has been defective, Miss Janet. She does not know how to cloak her words. But she did her best. She abbreviated the objectionable thing as much as possible, and called it her ‘nightie.’ ”

Mother hastened to change the subject and soon afterwards took Miss Janet away ; and I had no other excitement until fine weather and Sancho Panza arrived.

Because I had schooled myself so rigorously I think I was the least moved of any when my equipage came up to the door. Irving was there with a small medicine chest whose contents had already been exhibited and explained to the old man, my guardian and coachman. Mother and the two maids were burdened with rugs, cushions, a vacuum flask and a small parcel of provisions. Dad was unburdening himself of advice and irony.

“ For goodness sake, Edith, chuck in a few more wraps. What won’t go inside can be tied on behind ; they’ll find room for ’em somewhere, and the pony won’t say anything, poor beast. And give ’em enough to eat and drink ; they’re going to be away a couple of hours, you know. It isn’t an insignificant little trip like a Polar Expedition.”

Sancho Panza was as silent as the pony, but his eyes twinkled a little as they glanced half-furtively from father to mother, and when we were on our way he turned to me and said :

“ It’s waste o’ words arguin’ with the ladies, Mr.

Richard. Let 'em 'ave their own way, bless 'em. It makes life pleasanter i' t' long run. I've an old woman at 'ome myself, an' I know."

We drove slowly through the town, and when we had crossed the bridge and turned on to the steep highroad of my dream my companion got out.

"It's a roughish passage is this. We'd 'appen better lighten t' ship a bit."

As he was navigating officer I was not in a position to object, so I merely remarked :

"It's rather hard on you, Sandy. We cannot go far in this neighbourhood without finding a stiffish hill."

He thought this over for a minute. "It'll bring my fat down maybe. There's no tellin'."

I looked at him. There were no signs of unnecessary fat about that well-knit figure. He was a broadly built man of medium size, who had probably passed his sixtieth year, but though he stooped a little, there was that in the set of his shoulders and the style of his stride that gave the impression of physical strength and of self-reliance as well. His face was a ruddy-brown, wrinkled, and at times unexpressive, and he kept his mouth for the most part tightly closed. When it relaxed it set the whole face free, and there came a sparkle into the eyes deep down in their narrow grey caverns, and every wrinkle became a line of humour. I felt pretty safe with Sandy, though he did not seem to fit my conception of Sancho Panza.

He soon discovered that I was on friendly terms with nature; and at a bend in the road he drew up for a few minutes, partly for my sake, but more for the pony's; and he turned the carriage so that I could look back without effort.

The sun was in my face, but it gave a charming atmosphere to the scene, and only those who have the gift of looking through other people's eyes could realise what pleasure came to me.

The view differed from any I had ever seen before. One scene and one only had been stretched for me upon earth's canvas, and for twenty years I had been familiar with every detail of it. I knew how many clumps of trees dotted the landscape from Harcourt Hall to the Crag; from the Crag to the Viaduct. I knew how many pastures, ploughed fields and meadows lay between Romanton and the Nunnery. It seemed to me I had always known. Now I saw the other hemisphere, and my delight was childlike.

The old town lay blurred and indefinite in the sunlit haze of its own smoke: diamonds flashed upon the river's breast: pastures, green and yellow, slumbered in the heat; in the background was the bold outline of the Bastion, its details lost in the luminous mist, though I could just make out our house and the open window of my own attic.

Away to the right was a sweep of moorland, bathed in light that suggested colour yet was colourless; nearer to me a solitary silver birch—a very baby amongst the birches—was shaking emeralds into the breezes that played amongst its branches. Sycamore and ash nodded to each other across the roadway, and a clump of pines stood aloof in the field—black and unneighbourly.

I wanted to tell somebody about it so I told Sandy; and if he did not quite understand he had grace enough to listen sympathetically, and I therefore told him something of my life with the object of putting our relations on an intelligible footing at the outset. Much



of this he had heard before from Irving, and I soon saw that whether or no I could fit him into the character of Sancho Panza he had no such difficulty in regard to my rôle of Don Quixote.

He was walking by my side, for the road was deserted and the pony trustworthy.

"Lookin' at it one way," he said, "it's a bit of a mad business, this, isn't it, think ye? Carried up an' down t' steps for twenty year, an' your mother durst scarce leave t' 'ouse, an' now scourin' t' countryside to see life!"

I laughed. "Did you ever hear of a man called Stevenson?" I asked. "His friends know him as 'R. L.'"

He drew in his brows. "Stephenson?" he said. "It wasn't him 'at watched a kettle an' set t' railways a-goin', was it?"

"No," I said. "You're mixing up two steam men; but my man wasn't the Stephenson you are thinking of. My man wrote books, and one of them was called 'Travels with a Donkey.'"

Sandy's brows unbent. "It didn't ride inside wi' 'im, maybe?" he chuckled.

"It's a fair hit," I replied. "No, they walked; and got on very well together after an unpromising start."

"Aye, there's worse things to travel wi' nor donkeys," he concluded; and I said no more.

Sandy's opinion was unexpectedly confirmed a few minutes later. We had got to the top of the first hill, and as the road just there was nearly level the pony was conveying us along at a fair pace, when a voice came from beyond a curve we were approaching.

"What oh, driver! Steady on! Line not clear!"

Sandy checked the pony and a smile spread over his face as he said :

" 'E's a character is this. You're in for seein' life this time, sir."

A rather tall thin man in the much worn dress of a labourer was driving a pig in front of him with small success. He wore a cap on the back of his thick brown hair, and carried in his hand a stout twig, which might have been picked up on the roadside. He had no collar or waistcoat, and his breast was bared to the breeze.

" Now then, Sangwidge," he said, stroking the pig pleasantly with his switch ; " just move yer flitch o' bacon to either one side or t'other, will ye ? D'ye 'ear ? We can't 'ave t' traffic 'eld up all t' day."

" Sangwidge " showed no disposition to move from the centre of the road, and his master turned round and held up his hand like a policeman on point duty, but on seeing Sandy dropped it again and came forward with every expression of pleasure.

" Eh, Sandy, old lad, God bless ye. Yer t' best sight I've seen sin' my dinner. 'Ow are ye gettin' on ? "

He spoke slowly, in a tone of voice that was humorously confidential.

He retained one of Sandy's hands, squeezing it repeatedly ; and the twinkle in the old man's eyes multiplied.

" So you're 'ome again, Tom," said Sandy.

" I am, lad. I've returned once more to the dear old 'ome, as the flea said to the pigeon, but it's a sad world, Sandy. It is that."

He did not seem to find it so, for his whole face radiated merriment, and Sandy was not deceived.

“ Old man not partic’ler well pleased at seein’ you, I reckon ? ”

“ Don’t ’urt a son’s feelin’s, Sandy lad. The way ’e fell o’ my neck when he see me comin’ up t’ yard, ther’ isn’t words for it.”

“ I don’t wonder,” said Sandy. “ You ’aven’t settled to a reg’lar job yet, I suppose ? ”

“ Now, Sandy, I thowt ye’d ha’ known me better nor to ask a question like that.” There was mournful reproach in Tom’s voice, immediately followed by a series of short, explosive laughs. “ I don’t know who ye are, sir,” he continued, turning to me, “ an’ Sandy doesn’t frame to interduce me, but ’e’s known me long enough to know ’at I wouldn’t do any decent man out of a job. The Lord knows I wouldn’t.”

“ ‘ If a man will not work neither shall he eat,’ ” I quoted.

“ Aye, but I will work,” he continued, “ when I’m forced—an’ a bit at a time,” and he laughed again. “ But what’s t’ use o’ workin’ all t’ time? Grind, grind, day in, day out: ’ard graft, ’ard words, tired bones, an’ nowt much at t’ end of it? I live my life. I’m ’ere to-day an’ twenty mile off to-morra. I can sleep in a barn or under a ’edge an’ breathe free, an’ it isn’t oft I lack a meal.”

“ How do you manage ? ” I asked. “ Is it a trade secret ? ”

“ Lord bless ye, sir, yer no good at my job if ye ’aven’t a way wi’ ye. I don’t know ’ow I does it. I can follow ’alf a dozen ’at’s been turned away fro’ t’ kitchen door, but t’ missus ’ll serve me, if she does call me a lazy rascal.”

As I gazed at his weather-tanned, happy face I envied him his opportunities. He was the butterfly,



I the chrysalis. Was Irving right after all in precipitating me into a world so unlike that of my books? I had been content with my life in a negative sort of way, and now I found myself envying a vagrant who apostrophised a pig as "Sangwidge"! I smiled at the absurdity of the situation and returned to the highroad to find Sandy and his acquaintance still holding converse together.

"Whose pig are you driving?" asked Sandy.

"Eh, I'm forgettin' Sangwidge." The animal was now enjoying itself on a strip of grass across the way. "It belongs to t' old man. I'm earnin' my dinner by takin' it down to Dob End. We shall get as far, 'appen, if both wer days is lengthened. We 'aven't got on very fast. It isn't everybody as understands pigs."

"And you've much to learn?" I suggested.

"I've been sittin' at that beast's feet t' best part o' two hours," he said confidentially, "an' I've learnt a lot. 'E looks up at me a bit sin' an' 'e says, 'We aren't makin' much 'eadway, Tom'; an' I says, 'We aren't, Sangwidge.' 'Ye don't know 'ow to 'andle bacon, Tom,' he says. 'You wait a bit,' I says, 'while we get ye into rashers, an' I can take a knife and fork to ye'; an' 'e got as sulky as your old woman, Sandy, an' wouldn't budge another inch."

"So the pig has mastered you," I hinted.

Tom winked. "It's too 'ot to 'urry. I think after this bit of a rest we shall frame better. I 'aven't twisted 'is tail yet, but I 'appen shall do. It's a little rudder for a big ship, but——"

Tom's silence was expressive, and he turned to Sandy to make his adieux.

"Well, good-bye, Sandy, old lad," he said, grasping

his hand again and looking whimsically into my companion's face. "I shall think about ye when I lie awake at nights, an' I 'ope it'll be many a year afore, for I sleep sound. An' don't tell t' missus ye've seen me, or 'er tongue 'll clatter for a fortni't."

He gave a final handshake. "Good-bye, old lad. God bless you! An' good-bye to you, sir. Now, Sangwidge, time's up."

To my great disappointment we got no farther that day, and I did not see what lay on the other side. Sandy was inexorable, and the time limit was not exceeded.

We returned home, and I think I convinced the authorities that my Columbus crew had so far made no attempt at mutiny. All the same I was glad to settle down into the cushions of my easy chair and review the day's experiences. I admitted to myself that most people would have considered them unexciting enough, but they had given me a new thrill of a decidedly agreeable kind, and had called me to renewed action and effort. I went to bed determined to obey the call; slept and was refreshed.

## CHAPTER X

### IN WHICH I GET ON TO THE MOOR AT LAST

I HAVE seen it now, and there is no more mystery beyond the hill as I look out from my attic window. I have seen it, and I long to see it again. It is a plateau of moorland, affording glimpses of rich green valleys on either hand. In one of these lies a sheet of water altogether unlike the lake of my dream, and Overburn is on its farther side.

The Little Chap was with us. It was mother's idea, but the boy was not told what was in store for him. He came into the garden and held mother's hand tight as his eyes took in every detail of my turnout. Then he spoke. "Uncle Onry, that is a ve'y small seat in fyont of the ca'iage, isn't it?"

"It is, Norman."

"Do you fink the pony and the dwiver would mind if a ve'y 'ittle boy was to sit on it?"

Mother picked him up and kissed him, and he submitted patiently, having an end in view.

Once we were on the road, however, he preferred to sit on my footstool with his head between my knees; or when Sandy was walking up the steeper hills he would ask to be lifted out that he might walk, too. It was good to see how the Little Chap would trot along at Sandy's side, asking the old man questions in his quaint, serious way, and pondering the answers;



and he was not long in finding his way to my companion's heart.

Then when he was tired Sandy would lift him on to his vacant seat and let him hold the reins, and the boy was perfectly happy. His manner was dreamy, but his mind was alert.

It was a perfect day. There was little breeze even on the heights, yet it was only pleasantly warm. In front of us the moors appeared to run straight to the horizon, beyond which line after line of narrow clouds lay like a fleet of battleships upon a sleeping sea.

It was not long before the Little Chap's own eyes closed, and his head fell gently back upon my knee. I do not know how most men would have felt, and I can imagine that contact with a busy matter-of-fact world might deaden anyone's emotions, so that no joy-bells would be set ringing within him when a wealth of golden curls fell into his lap; but it was otherwise with me. Mother chaffingly remarks sometimes that I ought to have been a girl, but perhaps the truth is that a man such as I is sexless, or better still ambisexual. The thrill that ran through me wiped off a thousand years of mummydom if it did not entirely obliterate the mummy, and I wondered if a mother's heart felt like mine—so tender, so full of love and gratitude—when her little one was clasped in her arms. Hers must be an altogether richer and fuller emotion, I suppose, but in that case there will surely be some small ingredient of pain mingled with the joy.

The palm of a little brown hand was upturned upon my knee, and I covered it with my own; and Sandy looked down upon the sleeping child and then across

into my eyes and had sense enough to be silent ; but he smiled as if he understood.

And all nature hushed itself in sympathy, and I looked upon the face of the moor and loved it too.

Some moors may be nothing but stretches of brown and grey ; they may be wild and weird ; if beautiful, they may be monotonous like the measures of a long-continued dirge. But my moor is not like that.

There are some views, I do not doubt, to which distance lends enchantment, and though I had never seen this moor before, I had seen other parts of the great moorland belt—though only their distant edge—from my attic window, and under conditions that again and again had made me dumb before the matchless artistry of nature. Those who have never watched the sun set over these moors in autumn have something yet to live for. You look, as the shadows begin to lengthen and a faint mist rises in the valley, and the hills in the distance are darkly purple. Here and there, where clefts or rocks mark their sides, there are stains of black or grey. The nearer landscape is bathed in the unmistakable glow of evening ; the river is a motionless ribbon of light.

Then some wizard of the heavens sets free a stream of glory, none can describe, and earth and sky are flooded in an instant. That is the moment to watch the moors. The darkness flees ; the moors begin to flush ; the purple becomes pink. Then they blaze, and the fleecy clouds above are kindled and overhang the gleaming flood like burning tow. Quickly the fire spreads until every cloud is alight from end to end of the heavens. Golden tongues of flame leap out from the dazzling brightness, and the moors are burnished now. It is soon over. The sun dims its

light so that you can look upon its face, and with regal state and dignity passes from sight. The flush fades from the face of the moors; the purple darkens upon them again; the shadows deepen; twilight steals upon the earth; and the moon shines from the south.

But to be actually on the moors in the hush of a summer afternoon is different, yet there is enchantment still. This moor of mine had a variety of colour and contour that charmed and surprised me. It was not a mere carpet of purple, for the heather simply dotted its surface, though the dots were patches of some size I must admit. In the spaces between there were clumps of sombre gorse, with here and there a splash of gold, and long grasses, straw-coloured, bent beneath their own weight, like faded men upon whom has fallen the burden of years. Rugs of moss, soft and inviting to the eye in their choice green tints, were flung down everywhere, but reeds of some kind, orange and red, fringing their borders, told that the ground was swampy.

Below was Romanton, sleeping in the sunshine; and in the background range on range of hills.

I was glad the Little Chap was asleep and that Sandy was content to be silent. I spoke no word myself until a big bird, flying low, sped past us, uttering a hoarse cry. Then I asked Sandy to drive us home.



## CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH I MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF AN OLD  
GENTLEMAN AND HIS DAUGHTER

FOR the last fortnight I have been enjoying life so much that I have been disinclined to write about it. Whether or no that is a good sign I cannot quite determine, but Irving thinks not, and presses me to continue. He does not want me to become so used to my "nature medicine" as to gulp it down without recording results. He reads my records, and I suspect he rather likes looking at people through the artless eyes of a partially resuscitated mummy.

I really have something to write about, too. I have lost my heart to an old gentleman whom I encountered in the course of an unusually long journey the other day, and who has occupied my thoughts ever since to the exclusion of almost every one else.

I have been very well on the whole since I began my adventures, though I have had what Harriet calls a "backening" on two occasions. They were very slight, however, and each kept me indoors only one day. It is evidence of the kindly interest Providence takes in me that both these days were wet.

Most of my excursions have been short, and all devoid of special interest, though I have enjoyed them to the full, and have revelled in the quiet beauty of

our country lanes and the varied prospects that our hills afford. But the people I have met have been, from the outside at any rate, ordinary enough, and I have been thrown back upon the "Harriet Mixture."

My interest in Pimple has increased the girl's devotion to me. It is quite touching, though it is undeniably amusing also, to note her anxiety if I retire earlier or rise later than usual; and I believe she lies awake for hours listening for any sounds of distress from my room if she thinks I am not looking my best.

And she is too ingenuous to conceal her feelings. Dad got a friend of his to take a snapshot of me in the garden two or three weeks ago, and Harriet asked permission to retain one of the rough proofs that I had thrown into the paper-basket. She was indignant to the verge of tears when she brought up my supper a few days later.

"Ee, she does tell stories, does 'Melia," she explained in answer to my inquiry. "I've just told 'er to 'er face 'at I don't know wherever she'll go to if she doesn't mend. She told 'er young man not ten minutes sin' 'at I said my prayers every night i' front o' your photygraph, same as a Cath'lic. Ee, I went that 'ot, Miss Trichud, you could ha' toasted at my face."

"Isn't it true, then?" I asked.

Harriet hesitated. "Not i' t' way she meant it, it isn't. An' anyway if I do chance to 'ave my 'ead turned that way I'm not makin' calf's eyes at it same as she makes at 'er young man every two-a-three minutes. It's fair sickenin' to be i' t' kitchen wi' 'er."

To soothe her and divert her thoughts I asked her to suggest a route for the next day's excursion, and she replied without hesitation:

"Ee, Miss Trichud, I wonder if you'd like to go as far as Overburn. That's where I come thro', you remember, an' mother 'ud be rare an' pleased if ye'd just call at t' door. It's a' out o' t' way little place 'at 'ud suit you to nowt, an' anybody'll tell you where Mrs. Pegg lives. Ee, it would be grand if you was to call an' see my mother."

I had often wished to go but the distance had been considered too great. I was feeling very fit, however, and I wheedled consent from the authorities and went, and I am convinced that Harriet has done me a very good turn, though I do not forget that I am also laid under obligation to Norman Cyril Stafford, and the good angel who induced me to take him with me.

The Little Chap had been ailing for a week or so, and permission to accompany me had consequently been withheld, and it was only at the last minute that I decided to make another attempt, which this time proved successful. We took lunch with us and picnicked most enjoyably by the side of the busy stream that runs through and connects the great Airlee reservoirs, and then climbed the hill that leads to Overburn.

What a quaint, jumbled-up place it is! It must be called a village, I suppose, for it has a tiny church picturesquely placed on the edge of the cliff, down which it threatens to slide at any moment. But the houses are so few that they do not make even a decent hamlet, and what there are seem uncertain whether to stay there or to slip down the hill into the reservoir at their feet. There are cracks in the walls of some of the houses which indicate this double mind with rather startling clearness.

Mrs. Pegg's house was closed, and inquiry of a



neighbour elicited the information that "Easter" had gone down into Netherleigh to "do a bit o' shoppin' an' see 'er dowter 'at's i' service theer." Sandy explained to me that the young lady who succeeded Queen Vashti in the favour of Ahasuerus was known locally as "Easter," and that the name had no connection with the Christian festival.

I could imagine Harriet's disappointment at this ill-timed visit of her mother, and should perhaps have shared it but for the experience that followed.

As we drove slowly through the village on our way home we passed a large garden which simply blazed with colour. The house to which it was attached was small, but it had an appearance of dignity that distinguished it from its neighbours; and the old gentleman who was busily engaged, as I afterwards found, in ridding the soil of minute and almost unnoticeable weeds was evidently of another order than the villager. When he raised his head I saw a white tie and needed no further explanation.

He looked up at the sound of wheels, and a remark of the Little Chap reached his ears. It had not been intended for them, nor yet for those of the girl who stood beside him. Mother asked me first thing what the girl was dressed in, but for the life of me I could not tell her. It was something light and dainty—and I have an impression that it was cream-coloured, though the Little Chap says it was "byue."

Whatever it was she made a pretty picture as she stood by the old gentleman's side, with a sheaf of flowers in her arms, though I do not even remember what the flowers were. The boy must have confused me, I suppose.

"Uncle Onry! Uncle Onry!" he cried; "look

what pwetty fyowers the lady has got. Do you fink she would mind giving me just one of them? "

I saw her smile, and she was about to reply but the old gentleman anticipated her. He drew himself up at the sound of the Little Chap's voice, and with a gesture that was a command made Sandy stop. He had the most attractive face I have ever seen, even in a picture—massive, strong, intellectual, gentle as a woman's, pure as a child's. Hair, beard and moustache were white or nearly so; he was tall, muscular, virile, and every action told of good breeding and natural courtesy. He was without hat, as was his daughter, but he bowed his head in salutation, and said:

"My dear sir, you will oblige me. The little man would like a flower and he shall have one, or more than one. He has an eye for colour, for beauty, and he does not let the golden moment pass, this nephew of yours. It will give my daughter and me much pleasure."

The old gentleman's voice was as attractive as his face. It was refined and kindly, but it was above all hearty and gracious, and my soul caught the melody and the freshness of it and whispered to me that I had found a friend.

"Isn't he a darling?" said the girl; the reference was to the kiddie. "I think I will sell him some flowers for a kiss. What do you say, little boy, will you buy them from me?"

Norman did not reply, probably because he did not quite clearly grasp the nature of the proposed bargain; and it was unfortunately one of those transactions where I could not offer to pay for him, although I would do anything for the Little Chap.

The girl was moving towards the gate but her father detained her. There was a pretence of severity in his voice, but mirthfulness rippled through it.

"Doris, my child, you are too mercenary. If the little man likes to pay for the flowers he shall do so, but there is no compulsion, mind you, and he shall himself choose whether he pays you or me." Then turning to me he said :

"My friend, it is a very fine day and you can perhaps afford to waste a quarter hour. Will you bring the little man into the garden, and he shall find the flowers for himself? And I daresay he would not refuse a glass of milk, Doris, and some of Mother Pegg's famous queen-cakes. What say you? Will you give an old wayfarer this pleasure, sir?"

What could I say? I had had no chance of speaking until now, and mother's suggestion that the cream (or blue) coloured vision had made me speechless is manifestly absurd. I apologised for the Little Chap's cheek, but accepted the invitation, and I was conducted to a roomy garden seat placed on a small green island in a sea of bloom.

The girl had left us, and the old gentleman took Norman on a tour of inspection round the garden, but they returned empty-handed.

"Haven't you made up your mind?" I inquired.

"I fink I would like the lady to give me one," he answered, and I admired the little beggar's choice and was proud of him.

Before the girl returned with milk, lemonade and cake, my host and I had made some progress in the direction of acquaintance. I referred to his parish, but he undeceived me.

"My dear sir, I can say with a greater man than I



‘the world is my parish.’ But I have no special pastoral charge. The vicar is a very good brother, but he does not stand in my shoes. My shoes are several sizes too large for him, as his office is much too large for me. No ; we are friends, the good man and I, and we have great controversies. We hurl ‘isms’ and ‘doxies’ at each other and we grow very warm, but at the heart of us we know that these things count for little ; and by the grace of God, my friend, we are making for the same place : we are making for the same place.”

He smiled, but his face became grave again :

“No, sir, I am a stranger here. We have lived here twelve months, my child and I, ever since we laid the body of one who was very dear to us in the churchyard over the way. It was her own fancy to mingle her dust with that of her fathers, for her people lived in these parts ; and one day when the good Lord sends for me, Doris will see that I am laid by her side.”

There was brightness in the old man’s voice and brightness in his eye, but the most dull-witted could not have mistaken this for indifference.

I muttered some vapid expression of hope that the day was distant, but he replied cheerily :

“We do not know, my friend, we do not know. I have many mercies and I am still strong. I can lift a young rascal like this who would run away with my flowers, and can hold him above my head and shake him, thus——” and he seized the boy by the waist and held him, laughing, in the air.

He put him down again and his daughter led the Little Chap away. My companion fanned himself with his handkerchief and continued :

“Still, my friend, I am an old man, and I am going

slowly down the hill. All is well, however. The shadows lengthen but the sunlight is strong, and the way is easy."

"You are from the south?" I hazarded. "Don't you find it slow up here, and uncongenial? The people are rough, uneducated——"

He interrupted me. "My dear sir, I am of the south. I had never been in Yorkshire until I laid my dear wife to rest in the shadow of yonder church. But I have made this my home, and we are not lonely; even the dear child, who is young, is not lonely. Every villager knows the old man. Every farmer and every farmer's man and maid for miles round has a kind word for him. All the dogs know him and put their noses into his hand. They are rough of speech, these moorland folk, but they have great, warm hearts, though they are ashamed for you to know it. They are not easy to understand, but I understand them and we love each other. Yes, they have found a corner in their hearts for the old 'furriner,' as they call me, and they are all very dear to me. And, my friend, I can tell you the secret of understanding—Love is the great revealer."

Norman had returned, and was looking up into the old man's face with his hands clasped upon the old man's knees, and he said:

"I love you, and I love the lady, too, because you have given me the pwetty fyowers, and have taken me yound your ga'den."

The old gentleman's face lit up and his eyes ran over with fun.

"Ah, it is cupboard love, you young rascal! It is the loaves and the fishes! Now I am going to shake you the moment I catch you"; and as the Little

Chap darted away, laughing gleefully, he hurried after him with an agility that was surprising.

His daughter called to him in vain, and when he did at last return, panting a little, she remonstrated with him severely, or with as much severity as was possible to a girl whose face was framed for smiles, and who—but I must not forget that I am a mummy.

“Father forgets that he is no longer young, and is subject to asthma,” she said.

He turned to her playfully. “Nay, nay, it is my guardian who forgets that I am no longer young, and must not be kept in leading-strings. She would wrap me up in tissue paper, this child of mine, and pack me round with cotton wool, and put me in a little box. She is the terror of my life. She tyrannises over me.”

The autocrat put her soft face against his bearded cheek, and I felt considerably out of it. Then Sandy appeared upon the scene with an empty glass in his hand and a broad hint in his eyes, and I rose.

“This has been good,” the old gentleman said, as he laid his hand upon my arm. “My friend, our souls are akin. You will give me your address and I will call to see you, and we will talk about the things that matter. And you will come to see me. Ah,” he continued with animation, “why should you not come and stay with me for a week, and I will show you my neighbours? It is a great scheme. Promise me that you will come.”

I did not dare to promise, though I should have liked to, and I undertook to think about it.

I gave him my address, and Norman paid for the flowers, dividing the payment impartially between the joint-proprietors; and we drove away.

I am afraid I was abstracted on the way home, and



the kiddie had to make the most of Sandy. The fact is Doris obtruded herself upon my thoughts, and however sternly I tried to regard her she continued to smile at me in a way that made my heart beat rather agreeably. Then I tried to push my heart between us as a barrier, but it was not high enough to prevent her peeping pleasantly over the top, and we nodded to each other, so to speak, for the rest of the journey.

I wonder what Irving will think if this sort of thing should continue. He did not realise, I suppose, that his Columbus might be carried into the troubled waters of romance and exposed to the perils of siren voices. Not that Doris is a siren, of course, though she is charming enough to sit for the portrait of one, and in any case my old heart will carry me past as safely as the wax Odysseus used to stop his men's ears ; and being an adventurer I am prepared to take risks.

It is surely a sign of increased vitality that Woman interests me.

## CHAPTER XII

### IN WHICH MOTHER CAPITULATES

**I** SUPPOSE most people learn very early in life that there is nothing more sure than that their sin will find them out. The revelation of my secret misdoings came at a particularly unfavourable time, and this may perhaps be regarded as intentional malice on the part of stony-hearted Nemesis.

I had just referred to my Overburn experiences and was hoping that serious attention would be given to the old gentleman's proposal, when dad broke in with the entirely irrelevant inquiry :

"By the way, Dick, when did you play that fool's trick on the cobbler chap ? "

He did not look at me, but kept his eyes fixed on the cornice, and my reply that I was not aware that I had played any fool's trick on anybody apparently carried no conviction.

Mother, of course, was curious, and dad proceeded to enlighten her.

"Oh, he goes on his own now and then, Dick does. The strings to your apron will have to be lengthened, my dear, if he's to be held in, I can tell you. When he did it heaven only knows, but he's been setting up that one-eyed numskull down the road in a new line o' business, and very well the fellow seems to be doing out of it, too."

It was my turn to stare, and I did not need to act the part. Mother clearly thought that dad was romancing, whereas I could only conclude that he was exaggerating. He persisted, however, that I had put the man in the way of making his fortune ; and the uneasiness I felt at the discovery of my escapade was mitigated by the satisfaction of knowing that I was credited with having unknowingly done some one a good turn. He who does good by accident adds to the satisfaction of surprising other people that of surprising himself.

Mother pressed for enlightenment and looked apprehensive and rather severe.

“ You know him,” dad explained ; “ that half-blind lunatic on the Airlee Road who cobbles shoes, and cobbles them very well, too. Well, this adventurous son of yours strolls down one fine day and puts the chap up to monkey-tricks he’d never have thought of—taught him Hebrew or double-Dutch or something—and now the beggar’s got a card in his window :

### HANNIBAL WOOD

#### COBBLER AND MISOGYNIST

Dad boggled over the word and ended with a prolonged chuckle. Mother appeared unhappy : unbelief struggling with suspicion and disturbing her peace. She looked at me, and so did dad—out of the corner of his eye.

I thought it best to explain, and on concluding endeavoured to avoid criticism by inquiring how dad had come to know about it and how I had assisted Hannibal to increase his bank balance.



"He told me himself this very afternoon. I called in about my boots and happened to see the card. Never seen it before, though I pass four times a day. By Jove, the chap's as proud of the word as if he'd invented it and got it into the dictionary. I didn't know what it meant myself, and he looked queer when I asked him, but told me the whole tale after a minute or two. Says it's brought him no end o' trade. Folk come in with their boots to be done the new way, and ask him all sorts o' questions—whether or no it's done by machinery and is better than hand-sewn, and if it'll keep their feet from getting damp. He tells 'em all the same tale—that it makes 'em walk their shoes straighter, and is good for corns."

Even mother was amused, and I thought the moment propitious for re-introducing the Overburn invitation. Mother raised her eyebrows to indicate that the suggestion was beyond discussion, but I found an unexpected ally in dad. The worst of it is that dad's advocacy is often deliberately intended to provoke and irritate the other side.

Mother was obviously annoyed. "Talk about women changing their minds!" she said with some scorn. "Really, Richard, one never knows where you are. But of course if a man becomes a weather-cock it's just a sign of his superior intelligence. I wonder if you remember how long it is since you looked upon the whole thing as madness and washed your hands of it."

Dad's feet were in his slippers and his pipe was in his mouth. He is one of those men who are very tolerant of their own extravagances, and he insists upon having a fire in an evening long before the thermometer indicates the necessity. His legs were

taking up more than their fair share of the hearth ; but his attitude expressed his temper, which was easy, and he suppressed a yawn as he replied :

“ You can please yourself, of course. But you appealed to me for my opinion. The only thing that’s wrong is that my opinion isn’t the same as yours—that’s where the shoe pinches.”

He puffed away peacefully, and mother went on with her needlework. The expression on her face suggested dignified superiority, but it was lost on dad, who, taking advantage of the silence, continued deliberately :

“ Besides, why shouldn’t a man be a weathercock ! He’s a fool who sticks to an opinion just because he’s once held it. If I hadn’t had the courage and common-sense to change my opinions you’d have been the wife of a bankrupt before now. Weathercocks are made to turn, aren’t they ? I must allow my weathercock to turn in accordance with the breezes of circumstance—eh, Dick ? By George ! that’s rather neat, Dick, eh ? That was a bad shot of your mother’s, that weathercock was.”

He chuckled, and his eye sought mine for approbation. I had sense enough to know that my strength was to be quiet, but being human I smiled encouragingly, hoping like a coward that mother would not see it.

There was no such luck. Mother expected that smile and turned her fire upon me :

“ I really do think, Dick, that when I have done my best to please you, it is too bad of you——”

Dad came to my assistance and I was saved for the moment. )

“ Now what’s the good of that sort of nonsense

Edith? What's Dick done? Told you he's had an invitation and admitted he'd like to accept it. Well, it's as simple as falling out o' bed. If he isn't to go, say so, and there's an end of it."

"That's all very well," replied mother in a watery tone of voice; "but though you say you don't interfere, you are encouraging Dick all the time, and it makes it very hard for me."

"There you are," said dad, with a movement of the head that was too slow to be called a toss, and a manipulation of the eyelids indicative of disgust; "what did I tell you! Now for heaven's sake don't bring your pocket-handkerchief into the argument. Why can't you get down to hard facts? Irving——"

"You didn't think much of Irving's opinion two months ago."

"Maybe not; but Irving happens to be Dick's doctor, and I suppose he's got to be paid for his opinions. It would never enter a woman's head that the pleasant little conversation we had with him at dinner-time, when he told us that he didn't see why it should do Dick any harm, will run me into seven-and-six—not a penny less. And what makes Irving think—and he only thinks, mind you—that this visit would do Dick no harm? Reason is, all this gallivanting about hasn't hurt him. You can please yourself, but I say let him go if he wants."

Mother stooped to fumble among her skirts for the dreaded weapon of offence, and retorted:

"I don't suppose he would have wanted to go at all if there hadn't been a girl there."

I opened my mouth to protest, but dad's loud laughter spared me the necessity.

"Oh, oh! so the cat's out o' the bag at last! Afraid



Dick's going courting? Well, that takes the biscuit. And by the look on the young beggar's face you've scored a bull's eye this time. Women mayn't have much reasoning power, but I'll back 'em against all creation to smell out a romance."

Dad was greatly amused. He took his pipe from his mouth whilst he wiped his eyes, and ejaculated in a mirthful undertone, "We're getting on now, by Jove." My sympathies were alienated of course, and went over to the other side. The rush of blood to my face, however, appeared to alarm mother, who at once became entirely mistress of herself.

"We are both talking nonsense, Richard," she said with smiling composure, "and making Dick uncomfortable into the bargain. Courtship and marriage are unfortunately out of the question for him, poor boy; I only wish they were not. Forgive me, Dick. I was a goose just now."

"Tell her you'll forgive her, Dick, if she'll let you go," laughed dad.

"He won't take any such mean advantage," mother replied; and of course I didn't.

We dropped the subject without having reached a conclusion, but when I thought it over in my own room a little later I felt sure that I should be allowed to go, and I was childishly glad. It is strange how young I feel sometimes now. Every new experience makes me realise how much I have lost by being a mummy, and I am afraid my eyes and mouth are often open when I am driving about, for it must be remembered that I am discovering not a mere continent but life itself.

Sandy peeps at me and his eyes glisten, but he makes no remark, though I am beginning to think

that he takes a real and intelligent interest in my awakening. He drove me slowly round the market-place on one occasion recently, and the arrival and departure of the farmers' carts, the haggling between vendor and purchaser, the pranks of small boys and the horse-play of idle youths had an interest for me that others will not be able to understand. Here was a weekly scene with which the Netherleigh folk had been familiar from their infancy, but which was as strange and entrancing to me as a Carnival in Nice or Venice. Our market-place is just a wide square in a rather old-world country town, with an inn of some importance and a picturesque manor-house to give it dignity, but when it is bordered with baskets of gay flowers, and filled in the greater part with stalls containing the produce of field and factory—when men and women jostle each other in the crowd, and their voices mix with those of imprisoned ducks and fowls, it has a charm that I found fascinating, and I do not know how many people had stood to laugh at me before I awoke to the knowledge that I, with my Simple Simon air, was the uncovenanted attraction of the day.

But Overburn had provided me with a sensation of another kind. I had met there those who were on the same plane of life as myself, and yet were as unfamiliar as they were attractive. I wanted to know more of them, and I wanted to sit in the garden again and to get closer to the heart of the moor. When I came to analyse my feelings I discovered that it was the element of sympathy that drew me to Mr. Chesterfield and his daughter. Brief as our acquaintance had been I seemed to know them well, and I felt that they knew me. I cannot account for it, though I fell asleep trying to do so.

We had just finished tea the next evening when Mr. Chesterfield was announced, and within five minutes of his arrival he had captured mother's heart and gained dad's good will. Like the loquacious Tom, the old gentleman has "a way with him." You instinctively recognise his goodness, his abounding humanness. His eyes, his voice, his very gestures proclaim him a white man through and through.

The breath of the moors came into the room with him and swept over our spirits.

"I have only a quarter of an hour to spend with you," he said, as he sank into the deep saddlebag; "for to-day I am an aristocrat and travel in a motor-car. And, my dear Mr. Dallinger, it is one of the laws of modern life that you shall not offend a friend with a motor-car, and I am no law-breaker. Moreover, my friend has a weakness, like all the rest of us, and with him punctuality has been exalted to a cardinal virtue. But much can be done in a quarter of an hour. Madam—" he turned to mother with a smile and courteous inclination of the head—"your dear son warmed my heart the other day; we discovered a kinship of soul as we chatted together; and I am a selfish old man who when the feast is good is unmannerly enough to ask for more. I want you to let him come to me for a few days whilst the weather is warm and the days are still long, so that we may have great times together, and my dry bones may be revived."

Mother smiled but did not capitulate, though she replied very pleasantly. She was like an artist who paints in very dark shadows with dainty and delicate touches. The picture she proceeded to sketch of me and my condition would have scared most men away without further ado. It was so lurid that even dad



became interested and stared at mother open-mouthed, and I was enabled to understand without calling upon my imagination what a burden of care my parents had been carrying all these years.

The old gentleman, listening sympathetically, was perhaps the least moved of any.

There was a twinkle in his eye as he assured mother that he had no doubt I had given her as much trouble as ten sons, but that he was willing to relieve her of the burden for a little while, and he felt sure that the good Lord who cared for the sparrows would take care of me.

Then a thought struck him and he brightened.

"But why should you not come too?" he said with increased heartiness; "and perhaps your good husband also? It is a great scheme. We can squeeze you all into our little home, and my daughter will be delighted. You shake your head, sir, but at any rate your good lady?"

Dad bent down to knock the ashes out of his pipe against the bars of the grate, and he replied indifferently:

"My wife may go if she likes. She knows my opinion about Dick, but I don't interfere. A change would do 'em both good, if you were to ask my opinion."

The old gentleman's delight knew no bounds. He rose and shook dad's hand as though everything had been settled; and indeed mother's opposition was weakening visibly.

"Ah," he said, "that is good; it is very good, and we shall have great times together. Doris will make arrangements at once, and you will come to us on Monday. This has put new life into me, madam. I am already drinking the good wine of anticipation,

and it warms my blood. I am greatly obliged to you."

"It is a long way from the doctor if Dick should have an attack," mother murmured.

The old gentleman's face fell, but dad replied without removing his pipe :

"Of course it isn't likely you'll remember that we're living in the twentieth century. I daresay there's such a thing as a telephone even in Overburn. It's a curious thing that women——"

"Ah, my dear sir," interrupted Mr. Chesterfield, "you are a business man ; you see the practical side of things at once. You and I, madam, are less quick to think of these modern devices that bridge all distance, but they are there. We have the telephone in the village, and we could communicate with the doctor quickly."

"He'd be up in twenty minutes—less than twenty," commented dad ; "but what about sleeping ? Dick musn't walk upstairs."

That was satisfactorily arranged, and when the old gentleman left it was with the understanding that if various quite likely contingencies should not happen, mother and I would spent a few days at Overburn the following week.

Later on in the evening mother showed her capacity for making evil the handmaiden of good.

"If we have to go over there, Richard," she said, conceding the possibility somewhat grudgingly, "I think we will have Dick's room papered and cleaned down. I could slip over once or twice to see that it was being done right."

"Rubbish !" said dad. "What on earth should you have to come back for ? I suppose I shall be

here. I'm not going off on a jaunt of my own as soon as your back's turned."

"You!" said mother; "and what use would you be, pray? You would think the place had been cleaned if you were to see the maids with a pail of dirty water and a scrubbing-brush or two. Really, Richard, what do you know about it!"

Dad looked at me and winked. "I'm only for saving you trouble and expense, my dear. Please yourself, of course; but I haven't had the advantage of seven-and-twenty years of partnership with a Yorkshrewoman without learning a thing or two."

"We have been married only twenty-six years," said mother shortly, "as you ought to know."

It must have been with the object of tempering my pleasure in the forthcoming visit that mother remarked shortly afterwards:

"You can't take the kiddie with you, you know."

"Never mind," said dad; "there are always compensations in life if you only look for 'em. There'll be the girl"; and mother frowned.

"By the way," dad continued, "who is the kid? Hasn't he got a father? There doesn't seem to be a man about the house. Where on earth did they spring from?"

Mother told us their story. The child's father is in the army—a lieutenant in an artillery regiment, but at present on special duty of some sort in Egypt. It was not considered advisable for his wife and child to accompany him, so they remained for a short time in York, and came to Netherleigh because the Little Chap was delicate, and it was thought that his mother's native air might brace him up. The father was an East Riding man, but the mother had lived in Romanton



up to her marriage, and was not the sort of girl who makes friends easily—too shy and pensive.

Her devotion to her husband was great, and she gave way to depression in his absence. Mother spoke as if that were a failing, whereas I am inclined to class it as a virtue. I should like to feel that a nice girl was depressed when she hadn't me close at hand. This, however, is a parenthesis. I gathered that she was not much more than a child herself and not at all the sort of girl for a soldier's wife, yet I pitied her because she was lonely and forlorn, and out of love with her ultra-fashionable Romanton friends. Mother seemed to save her pity for the kiddie, who gets his deep, thoughtful eyes from his mother, and lives in too heavy an atmosphere to be as healthy as a boy ought to be.

Thinking it all over I came to the conclusion that the possession of a heart, healthy or unsound, is an effective bar to a normal enjoyment of life. Here am I, swathed in mummy-cloths because my heart has failed, and here is this soldier's little wife, cribbed in a hermitage because her heart has *not* failed. It is all very puzzling.

## CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH I MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF EASTER PEGG  
AND HER HUSBAND EPHRA'M

I WOKE early on the Tuesday morning at the call of the sunshine which had entered by the open and uncurtained window and leapt from the mirror above the mantelpiece the whole breadth of the room on to my bed. I opened my eyes lazily and blinked as the bright rays greeted them; then moved my head a little on my pillow and looked about me.

The padre's drawing-room had been converted into a bedroom, and a cabinet and some other light articles of furniture had been pushed into one corner to make room for the washstand and chest of drawers, which had been brought down for my use. A few choice etchings and photogravures were hung on the daintily papered walls; and there were several ornaments and framed photographs on the mantelpiece flanking the ormolu clock, which interrupted its tick to inform me in musical tones that it was six o'clock.

The foot of my bed came close to the fireplace, and the padre's elevated shakedown was alongside the window. It was perilously small for so big a man, and of such irregular dimensions that I took the liberty of examining it during the morning, and found it to consist of an ingenious combination of table, stools, small boxes and rugs, corded and wedged into a

compact and fairly level foundation for the bedding and bedclothes. This understructure had been carefully covered with a neat white counterpane, or something of the kind, so that the nakedness of the land might not be betrayed by any disarrangement of the clothes on the bed itself.

This was later knowledge, however. As I now looked across I merely noticed with amusement that the bedclothes were in a heap upon the floor, and that the padre was sitting in his pyjamas upon the bed with the pillows piled up behind him for support.

The windows opening into the garden had been pushed out to their full extent, giving free admittance to a merry breeze which ruffled the old man's grey hair and puffed mischievously between the pages of the periodical he held in his hand. Three or four books and as many magazines lay around him on the bed.

I lay still and watched him. He was reading with evident enjoyment, and in observing the play of his features I became thoroughly aroused. At length a very pronounced series of chuckles proved infectious and the padre, seeing that I was awake, proceeded to scold me for not sleeping longer. When I retorted with a *tu quoque* he replied :

"My dear Dallinger, our cases are not parallel. When I was your age, and for many years after, Somnus and I were very good friends. We are good friends still, but he tires a little of my company and leaves me betimes."

"He feels cramped, perhaps, in that bed," I suggested. The padre looked up and down his couch and replied waggishly :

"It is a very good bed, sir, though it is also, I admit, a very little one. When I got into it last night



I said to myself 'Behold now the place where we dwell is too strait for us,' but we managed very well."

He broke off to call out a cheery salutation to a man who passed down the road in a milkcart, and laughed as he turned to me again.

"It was young Parkinson. He gaped when he saw my flannelled arm."

I got up and walked over to his bed to examine his books. There was a Bible, open at a well-thumbed portion of Isaiah; a volume of Montaigne; another of Goldsmith; a quarterly, and several monthly magazines. The periodical on his knee was the current issue of *Punch*.

"You've had a rather mixed-up intellectual breakfast," I remarked, as I took one of the magazines and returned to bed.

His face lit up and he replied heartily:

"My friend, you are right, and the fare has been good and I shall digest it well. I began, as I invariably do, with a chapter or two from the Book of Books. This morning I opened at one of the finest pieces of literature in the whole republic of letters—'Ho, every one that thirsteth!' My dear Dallinger, I drank deep and refreshed my soul.

"Then I read a chapter in Montaigne, and got honey out of the lion, and more solid food as well. When you awoke I was washing it down with *Punch*. I tell you, my friend, it was the breakfast of an epicure that you interrupted by waking so early."

"A bit incongruous, isn't it?" I queried.

"Not at all," he replied. "Varied diet is good; and the man who reads only one kind of book is not wise. Montaigne is Saul among the prophets, perhaps, but he has a mission and a message to which I am

glad to pay heed. As to *Punch*—he is a great friend of mine, who canes me and all of us with such cordiality and good humour that we bear him no ill-will. I read *Punch* as I read my Bible—not thanking God that I am different from these other fellows who have merited the rod, but taking my place with the rest and holding out my hand to get my knuckles rapped. It is all part of my religion. My religion has always laughter in it—‘my mouth is filled with laughter and my tongue with singing.’ ”

It seemed true enough and it set me thinking. I always feel uneasy when the subject of religion is mentioned ; but that may be because the parson who visits me periodically and speaks comfortable words in a low monotone for an interminable quarter-hour, has a different voice altogether when he discusses the ‘Varsity Cricket Match. The padre doesn’t compose his face when he mentions religion—the words come so naturally that I should not hesitate to laugh if I wanted to.

Perhaps he divined something of my thoughts for he began again :

“Life is a good thing, Dallinger, too good to be wasted, and I have always been anxious to get the most I could out of it, and to help others to do so. And you can’t do that unless you understand life, and the comic paper and the ha’penny journal help me to understand it. I read all sorts of papers, yellow and white, but I chew my food and if it’s nasty I don’t swallow it. And as I said just now I enjoy it. I like humour for its own sake and I like dash and adventure, too. Sometimes I buy a boys’ paper and lose myself for an hour in the thrilling adventures of Jack the Cowboy, and I have a great time. Oh, I can talk to

boys, I assure you. We are good chums, the boys and I."

I could well believe it, and I began to understand how a man could be all things to all men, and yet no time-server; and I began to realise that the kindliness which had attracted me had its source in a religion that was more profound and glowing than any I had encountered before. I have moved so little among men that I do not know if such natures are common; but the sweet, fresh breath of a religion that was natural came as a revelation to me.

I thought of my own life, and of how it had been spent with books, and I told him all about it, and the conversation with Irving which had opened my eyes and started me afresh. He listened without interrupting me until I paused, and then said:

"Your friend was quite right, and I must get to know this doctor of yours. What strain your heart can stand I cannot tell, and you must act prudently. Yours is a wonderful adventure—a wonderful adventure." There was a far-away look in his eyes as he spoke. I said nothing. Presently he jumped off the bed and began to gather his clothes together.

"And now I will have my cold tub and wash away the cobwebs. You will do well to stay in bed awhile, and after dinner we will go together to see Mother Pegg, and you shall read in a large book. She is a good soul, Mother Pegg, though she speaks in a tongue that I do not always understand. She is broad, my friend, in more senses than one, but we have great times together. She does our baking and is supervisor of our household arrangements, holding the rod firmly over our little maid, but you shall see her for yourself



if all is well " ; and with his clothes over his arm he left the room.

Mother would have had me remain in bed until after dinner, for I had not been too well on the previous day ; and she would have been peremptory, no doubt, if she had known what an argument I had had with my heart during the night before sleep visited me.

But she did not know, and by eleven o'clock I was up and out. How could I lie in bed when the morning called me ! When the very sparrows hopped into the room and twitted me for my laziness ! When the fragrance of flowers was wafted to my nostrils, and the sound of laughter to my ears ! When I could see mother and Doris walking arm-in-arm among the roses ! It was more than flesh and blood could endure, so I got up, dressed, and joined them.

The garden proved a fool's paradise. The blunt truth is they did not want me, and took the earliest opportunity to saunter off into the village, and I was left to my own devices until the padre returned from the post office. I was in the mood for finding a serpent in the garden, but failed, the nearest approach to the reptile being an enormous snail, black enough to represent anything malicious and spiteful.

After dinner the padre and I walked very slowly as far as Mother Pegg's.

The house was ordinary. My amused glance fell at once upon the big Bible in the window, partially concealed by a sort of netting on which stood a flourishing aspidistra. The other books mentioned by Harriet were conspicuous on a hanging shelf above the dresser, where they were guarded by two fierce-looking animals in china who faced each other grimly, but bore no resemblance to any creature with which I was

acquainted. Two ghastly enlargements, representing, no doubt, Father and Mother Pegg, occupied the best positions on the same wall. They were framed in mahogany, and gave me the creeps, for the lady's eyes, which were unnaturally large and frightened, followed me wherever I stood or sat. It was a pleasure to turn to the highly-coloured almanacs on the other wall that advertised the calling of certain Netherleigh tradesmen.

The house was ordinary: not so the occupants. The moment I saw Mother Pegg I understood my old friend's reference to a "large book."

To say that she was stout is to trifle with facts—she was ponderous. There may be stouter women in shows, but I should not want to pay to see them.

The surprising thing was that she was not unwieldily with it, and although her walk conjured up the picture of a well-fed duck, she moved with comparative briskness, and her manner was brisk too.

"Ee, come in wi' ye," she said, as she opened the door. "It's Mester Richard ye've browt wi' ye, isn't it, Mester Chestyfield? I wor reight sorry to be out, sir, when ye called t' other day. But theere, t' milk's spilled now an' t' cat mun lick it up."

She ran her apron quite unnecessarily over two polished chairs and wished me to take her own rocking-chair, which I declined. As the padre also refused, she sank into it herself with a flop that made my nerves tingle. The chair had suffered the amputation of an arm for reasons that were obvious.

"The body of my mortality is well, sir, I thank you."

The thin, spiritless voice came from the shadow on the other side of the hearth; and turning, I saw a slightly-made little man, with a pale, almost emaciated

face which was not without traces of refinement, but overcast with such sadness as I had never seen before. The padre was greeting him with his accustomed cordiality, but nobody offered to introduce me, unless a cheery remark of Mother Pegg's could be construed into an introduction.

"It's nobbut Ephra'm, Mester Richard. Tak' no notice on' im; he's as deaf as a post ommost, an' as gawmless as yer walkin'-stick." The explanation was accompanied by a good-humoured smile that robbed it of all uncharitableness.

"Is he a neighbour?" I inquired, stupidly.

"Ephra'm? Oh dear! Oh dear!" Mrs. Pegg's amusement brought the tears into her eyes, and her apron had to be employed to wipe them away. "Nay for sure, Mester Richard, 'as our 'Arriet never chonced to mention 'er father? 'E's my lawful wedded, Ephra'm is, what I took for better or worse. A neighbour! Well, that has tickled me."

I apologised; but the tickle spread over her whole body and formed huge waves of merriment; it was so infectious that I caught myself laughing too. Harriet had never mentioned her father, and I had somehow received the impression that her mother was a widow.

"Ye see, Mester Richard," she said at length when the waves had subsided into ripples, "it's this way wi' Ephra'm. He's just a bit—ye know. 'Armless, an' all that, but summat lackin' in 'is 'ead-piece. Allus 'as been, poor lad, nobbut 'e's gotten worse as 'e's gotten older, an' ther's odd times when 'e's a bit bad to manage. But my motta 'as allus been to keep smilin'. Lord love ye, ye can't 'ave everythin' i' this world, and ye can get on famous most times if ye keep smilin'."



"You're a philosopher, Mrs. Pegg," I observed.

"I don't know about that," she replied; "but I allus 'ave said 'at it's wer Christian duty to mak' t' best o' things, whether they're 'usbands or what they are. We've all crosses o' one sort or another, an' 'e's nobbut a little un, isn't mine."

The ripples came on to her cheeks again, and I looked round at her husband, who was quoting Scripture in the dreariest of voices. Then I glanced at the padre, who was listening with the light of sympathy and understanding on his face. Mrs. Pegg read my thoughts and lowered her voice to that level which always seems to make it twice as resonant:

"'E's a grand man is Mester Chestyfield. Ther's 'ardly a day but 'e comes in to sit wi' 'im 'alf an hour, an' 'e listens as polite as if t' poor chap wor talkin' sense."

"But he is talking sense," I urged. "At any rate he knows his Bible. He cannot always have been in this condition, surely."

"No, as I say, 'e's gotten worse, but I've known 'im all 'is life, an' 'e wor short weight fro' t' first. An' it like turned to religion, if ye understand. They wor extra-special religious wor all 'is fowk, an' 'e wor browt up strict, Ephra'm wor. But what bothers me is 'at 'e has all t' Scriptur' passages off 'at 'e'd do better to forget. 'E remembers all t' cursin's, does Ephra'm, but 'e forgets all t' blessin's."

"It's a good thing your disposition is different," I said. "You balance one another."

"Well, 'appen so," she remarked doubtfully; "but ther's odd times when 'e seems to get t' weight on to 'is side o' t' scales. Dark thowts weigh 'eavier nor lead, ye know. But ye can manage as long as ye keep smilin'."

"You were a brave woman to marry him," I ventured, "knowing him as you did."

She did not take the bait, but passed it over with a laugh:

"Now worn't I, think ye? Ye see I wor as gawmless as our 'Arriet when I wor a lass, but I mended faster. There wor lots o' candid friends 'at warned me 'at I should live to rue it; but I've made t' best on 't, an' I wouldn't swop places wi' some o' them 'at turned up their noses t' most."

"And yet he must be a great care," I urged.

"Well, that's as ye take it," she replied. "A little un's a great care if ye look at it i' that way, an' ye do find some 'at seems to be fair ooined wi' their childer'. An' it's reight enough 'at ther's no end to what ye've got to do for 'em. They're to wean afore ye know where ye are, an' then ther's the'r teeth—an' ye need all t' grace the Lord 'll gi' ye. Then they've no sooner gotten on to the'r feet nor they start wi' t' measles an' mumps an' 'oopin'-cough, an' owt else they can pick up. An' ye get ommost ooined to death wi' 'em, ye're that worn out. But if ye call 'em a care it's when ye're ommost at t' far end, an' ye mean nowt by it. Ther's some cares ye'd be sorry to be rid on; an', bless ye, Ephra'm's just a big ba'rn 'at's never fairly grown up."

My heart warmed to Mother Pegg, and I hinted that my own people knew something of what care meant in this connection.

She responded at once:

"Ee, do ye know, Miss Doris browt yer mother to see me this mornin', an' they did mak' a grand pictur'. I could like to 'ave 'em in a frame just as they stood as they came in, an' yer mother wor that nice I could

do owt for 'er. If 'Arriet didn't do 'er best wi' a missus like 'er I'd warm 'er jacket for 'er, big as she is. She's one o' my sort, is yer mother, if I'm not speakin' too free, she keeps smilin'. Ee, I like them 'at can smile when ther's a weight on the'r 'eart."

Ephraim had caught her closing words, for she had unconsciously raised her voice. He left his seat and came towards us ; then bent his sad eyes upon me and said, standing with his hands behind his back :

"Easter is wrong, sir. She puts her trust in mirth, yet the end of mirth is heaviness, and sorrow is better than laughter. She heeds not the words of the Master, 'Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep.' She forgets the warning of the Preacher that there is a time to weep and a time to mourn. She is all for smiles and laughter when God sees that the wickedness of man is great in the earth, and we ought to be afraid of His judgments. Therefore, says the Lord, 'it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for thee.' "

As he spoke the closing words he shut his eyes and extended one hand towards his wife, who contented herself with saying :

"Now, sit ye down, lad, an' don't tak' on so. Ther's lots about singin' an' laughin' an' such like i' t' Bible, though I 'aven't 'em off by 'eart same as you. They worn't all weepin' prophets."

The man shook his head very slowly and mournfully, and moved his lips though no sound came from them. The padre, however, placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"'The judgments of the Lord are true,' my friend, 'and righteous altogether,' but they are 'sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.' Therefore my soul shall be joyful in my God ; we are filled with comfort ;



we are exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." The old man's voice was full of assurance and the ripple of laughter was in it.

Ephraim shook his head. "'I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doeth it,' " he quoted. Then he drew himself up and extended both his hands, though his eyes remained closed :

"Are you a prophet of the Lord, and do you say, 'peace, peace; when there is no peace.' Listen to me, you who heal the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly. I say this land is full of wickedness, and it is no time for mirth. 'Hear, O earth,' saith the Lord; 'behold I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.' I see punishment ahead; I see hell let loose upon the earth. 'They shall lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion.' Therefore, gird thee with sackcloth, and make thee mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation; for the spoiler shall suddenly——"

I was listening, fascinated and a little awed in spite of myself, when he stopped abruptly and swayed a little. His wife saw the movement and rose instantly. She put her arm about his neck and spoke soothingly in his ear as though he were a sickly child, and gradually led him to his chair, where he lay back panting a little and very white, and the padre and I, with a mere word of farewell, left the house.

I learned her story as we walked home.

"Esther Pegg is a good woman, my friend, and I believe she loves her husband and cares for him like

a mother. And she is very much afraid that you will find it out, so she masks her words and is very cunning. But the mask is thin and no one is deceived."

She had never told the padre the story herself, but he had heard from some of the villagers that Ephraim had been a simple lad and had lived in a home where there was religion without joy, and love without emotion. He lost his father when a youth, and his mother had a big burden to carry and carried it bravely and patiently, but not cheerfully. Yet she loved her boy, and when she knew she was coming to the brink of the river the burden was heavier than it had ever been before. He was twenty-two and still simple, and there was not an earthly friend to love and care for him—not one. The poor soul thought the Lord was good to her, and had heard her prayers when Esther said she would marry him. Esther was nursing the old woman and she pitied the lad and loved his mother. She thought neither of herself nor of the children that might be born to her. She just saw a poor soul bent beneath the weight of a cross, and being strong she took it from her and carried it herself.

"And I honour her," said the padre softly, "I honour her."

She had not been unhappy in her married life, though as time went on her husband's mind became more clouded. Ephraim, however, had a simple faith in God, and was kind to his wife, and grateful in a childlike way, though he feared she was not among the elect. She was herself of a cheerful spirit, and they were not poor; they had just a little more than sufficient, and that, as the padre said, is riches.

I meditated deeply upon the tragedy of Esther which all could see save Esther herself, and like the

padre I asked myself again and again whether or no she had made a mistake. The padre thinks she will one day hear "the good Lord," as he terms Him, say: "Inasmuch as you did it to poor Ephraim you did it unto Me," and if that means a Distinguished Service award I am sure she will have merited it.

I am enjoying myself thoroughly, and each day increases my indebtedness to Irving. I am cultivating my soul with diligence, and look with sympathetic pity upon my heart when it occasionally shows resentment.



## CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH I BLUSH AND DORIS CRITICISES ME

I HAVE discovered to my annoyance that one of the by-products of an enlarged life is the art of blushing. So far as I know, I never blushed in the mummy days ; and when one has got to my advanced years the unsealing of the fountain is attended with a certain amount of humiliation. It seems so ridiculous that a full-grown man cannot control a sudden rush of blood to the cheeks, and that to attempt to do so results merely in setting free a larger flow. Doris says she feels sure she has seen cures advertised in the papers, but cannot guarantee that they are not quack remedies. She said it with the same sympathetic and innocent unconcern that might have accompanied a reference to a corn cure ; but Doris is something more than Arcadian.

Mother had gone down to Netherleigh to see how the cleaning-down was getting on, and Sandy was to drive her back after tea. The rest of us were having a lazy afternoon in the garden ; but the padre, having found his friend among the leaves of the book he had proposed to read, was now lying with his head well back on the sloping deck-chair, tempting the bees to disappointing adventures in the neighbourhood of his open mouth.

Doris and I occupied two other garden chairs, and

it was a casual reference of mine to the exquisite shading of a petunia that introduced the subject of blushing by revealing my proficiency in the art.

“But I thought you were colour-blind,” she remarked, turning her eyes quite gravely upon mine. She has really nice eyes—that large, brown kind that seems so pathetic, but from whose depths merriment can suddenly flash and glitter like the leap of trout in the limpid waters of the Wharfe.

“Colour-blind?” I replied. “I am no more colour-blind than you are. What in the world put that notion into your head?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said, and so demurely that I was still unsuspecting; “but I understood your mother to say that you called my blue muslin cream-coloured.”

It was then that I blushed; and to blush when you are reclining in a deck-chair on the lowest notch, with no chance of simulating a sneeze or of diving for your handkerchief, and, what is more, with an attractive girl looking straight into your eyes and making you see that she is sorry for you—I say this is most disconcerting.

I frankly admit that I was disconcerted, and I spent so much time in mentally upbraiding mother for perfidy that I gave Doris a chance to get in another shot.

“You blush rather prettily,” she said, with the air of a connoisseur. “Some people do it very awkwardly—in patches, you know; and at times the colour is not pleasing—too bricky—but yours is a nice shade and you spread it evenly; no one could mistake it for apoplexy.”

This gave me time to collect myself.

“I’m glad you like the colour,” I said. “It’s one you can’t get in shops: I make it myself. I have only

discovered quite recently that I had the pigment about me, and now I fear I've more than my share."

" 'Pigment' 's a nasty word, isn't it? " she said musingly.

" Beastly," I replied, and then she laughed.

I had known Doris three days—not a very long time, but that does not matter. There are days when the sun seems to overtake the dawn and rend the veil of night imperiously, so that what was dark a moment or two ago stands out crisp and clear in the sunlight. With Doris and me there was very little sense of growing acquaintance. We understood each other from the first, and were old friends in a few hours.

And the best of it is that we are so absolutely rational about it, simply because we understand each other so well and are sensible enough not to make fools of ourselves. Doris realises that I am only on ticket-of-leave from my attic prison, and there is no " sighing like furnace " nonsense about either of us.

I wish I could paint Doris's portrait satisfactorily with my pen. I don't know why I should when her image is engraved upon my mind, and these records are dedicated to Oblivion ; and when I consider the perfection of the model and the clumsy imperfection of the artist, the wish seems a presumption, and I had better not try. Once, many years ago, when the rich and romantic character of some water-colour sketches from my brush had led mother to see visions of a Dante Gabriel Dallinger, I produced a landscape with a stormy sky and a rainbow. I spent a lot of time over the rainbow, and dad, I remember, affirmed that it could not possibly be mistaken for anything else, but I was so ill-satisfied with it myself that it definitely closed



my career as a painter. If I couldn't paint a rainbow I despair of painting Doris ; and I will get back to the garden.

"All the same you *didn't* know that my dress was blue, and the kiddie did," she said.

"The kiddie is too young to be dazzled," I explained.

I was rather pleased with the retort, and I began to feel less a mummy and more a man.

"Em——. It's a poor excuse, don't you think?"

"It isn't really an excuse : it's an explanation."

She shook her head, and I tried again.

"I knew it was something light and flimsy, and after all I don't believe it had much colour in it. To be quite candid I was not sure about the shade, but in thinking it over I thought it unlikely that you would be wearing colours—not that I know much about what is customary under such circumstances—and, therefore, I ventured on the cream."

I put it very clumsily but she understood, and her face sobered a little.

"I see ; it was natural enough, but do you know I never wore black, because the dear old mother wished me not to. I was a bit rebellious at first, because nothing but black seemed to harmonise with my feelings, but father helped me to understand. I wish you had known mother. She was as gay as the birds—fresh as a morning in May. She and father had the same outlook on life, and the way they loved each other was a revelation. It's a fact that I never think of them without realising that I am a mistake. I ought to have all their qualities in excess, but I haven't. I am ever so much more staid and calculating than either of them—I suppose I'm the result of another law that operates for the protection of impulsive

parents." This was said merrily, but she seemed to mean it.

"Nonsense," I said; "in many ways you are your father over again."

She shook her head confidently. "Not really; I'm not like mother, either, but I am what I am, and we needn't bother about that. I am more conventional, for one thing—more worldly, if you like—but I'm very fond indeed of my parents, and wouldn't grieve them for anything, and mother would have been hurt if I had 'gone into mourning,' as we say."

"I understand," I said.

"Do you?" she continued. "You see I feel that I have to justify myself and that sort of thing, whereas father wouldn't see the need of it. 'If mother had gone away for her health, lassie,' he said to me when I was sore about it; 'if she had gone to New Zealand, say, for a few years we should have missed her grievously, but we should not have put on mourning. We should have been glad that it was well with her.'"

"Yet you miss her?" I said.

"Every hour of the day," she said in a low voice, whilst the tears came into her eyes, "and we talk of her every day, father and I. He is very brave, and he really does practise what he preaches. He looks upon death as an incident in life, that is all, and if you *can* look upon it in that light it doesn't make you more miserable."

She brushed the tears away with her hand, and the sun came out again. "All that is the outcome of your colour-blindness," she said. It was just like Doris. She must and will be in the sunshine, and lead you there.

I was sobered, however, and remarked:

"I have stood on the brink of what you call an incident in life more times than I can remember, but the idea isn't as attractive as it used to be. I feel like making a fight for it"; and I told her about my dream and how the Little Chap pulled me back to life.

When Doris listens she does it whole-heartedly, and the way she looks at you makes you feel that mere sentiment is rather cheap. She is gay but practical. She broke in:

"Yes. Well, I'm glad he did it, but you ought not to need any pulling back. I wouldn't stand and be enticed into the boat at your age. It isn't—well, it isn't manly. It's only in gift books for the young that people want to be angels, and they are not very convincing. I don't want to be an angel."

"To go back to the pasture where we left our sheep," I said. "Will you excuse me if I say that you know nothing about this matter? You're just a delightful theorist. But put yourself in my place. Look at what I've gone through, and particularly at what I haven't gone through. Up to now I've existed and not lived," and as she hadn't heard it before, I gave her my mummy story.

"But I don't understand," she remarked when I had finished. "Was your old doctor something of a stupid, or is it the new doctor? If your heart will allow you to do what you have been doing for the last two months, why have you been five-and-twenty years in finding it out? It looks as if there had been a screw loose somewhere."

"That's what we're engaged in proving, you see," I answered. "I have been weeks together without an attack in the past, but old Banks was certain that



only care and quiet would keep me alive for ever. Irving, however, doesn't think much of suspended animation, and he calculates that I can flutter my wings and still last out till Christmas—so to speak. Hearts are funny things, as you may discover one of these days when you realise that you have one." I become oracular when on the subject of hearts.

"Well, be patient with me," she replied, with mock humility; "and don't be superior because you've got a heart that nobody else wants"; and I admitted to myself that I was beaten.

Doris softened, and when she softens her voice becomes strangely tender.

"I don't know anything about it," she acknowledged, "still, I don't think I am far wrong. All the same, it would be hard lines if you were to cross the river the sooner because of this experiment in living."

"It would and it wouldn't," I answered with conviction. "I should have the satisfaction of knowing at any rate that I'd walked there. I should be jolly sorry to go, but I wouldn't stifle in my attic again as the price of long life."

"Bravo!" she said, and her whole face mirrored her feelings. "I like that. I hope I should be 'jolly sorry' to go, too. Well, then, don't go if you can help it. When you get the *laissez-aller* feeling in your next nightmare I'll join the kiddie in pulling you back."

"Will you?" In my eagerness I raised myself and leaned towards her, and it was then her turn to blush and be confused. I was surprised at myself, but in that blush I found much happiness, and I experienced a certain measure of self-respect. The mummy was slipping farther and farther away, and

I was not without hope that some day he would return to his primordial dust.

The padre woke up at that moment, and sprang to his feet. He is one of those who rouse themselves the instant sleep leaves them.

"That has been good," he said. "I believe I have been 'hard-on' for ten minutes. You need not call out the watch. The time I have stolen was my own."

Doris went indoors to help forward the preparations for tea, and the padre turned to his book again and read me one or two favourite passages. He was getting ready, he told me, for a sort of study-circle that meets once a month in the large kitchen of his house. Some ten or twelve men gather for instruction, and the padre lectures to them. Afterwards there is discussion and coffee, and altogether a "great time."

"I have my turn and then they have theirs, my friend, and I take little or no part in the debate that follows. I am then a learner and I learn much. If I am appealed to I answer; otherwise I am silent, and the good men reply to each other. But I hope you will be present on Saturday night, and you shall hear for yourself. Aha, my friend Carmi! I hope you are very well——," the padre dropped the book and hastened to meet the postman who at this moment opened the gate.

The newcomer was a man approaching old age, but wiry and nimble still. His face and hands were firm, but dyed by the weather a deep tan, with a spot of red in the middle of the cheeks. His face was expressionless, and I failed to read in it any indication of his character. He wore the regulation cap and jacket, but his trousers were snuff-coloured, and so short that they left bare a rim of scarlet stocking

above his heavy boots. He carried a stout stick in his hand, and his bag was slung at his side.

"You are hot, my friend," said the padre, "and will walk the better for a glass of lemonade. No?"

"Them 'at sups ofttest, thirsts ofttest," replied the man—sourly, as I thought; but the padre knew him.

"This is my good friend Carmi Rhodes," he said, turning to me. "He is in the king's service, as you see, and it requireth haste. Have you got any letters for us, Carmi?"

"I've naught but a message this round, sir," replied the man. "It's fro' Jasper Thorn's widda. She said I was to call an' tell you 'at it 'ud be much if she lasts while morning."

The padre did not seem so concerned as might have been expected; on the contrary, his eyes twinkled.

"Ah, is that so? And she would have me go to see her before she pays her last debt. She gave you sixpence, no doubt, Carmi, for bringing me the message?"

"Did she!" returned the postman in a tone that was not interrogative. "She gave me t' same fee as she always pays—foul looks an' groans. Sal Thorn 'll pay for naught 'at can be got free."

"Then, my friend, she is not going to cross the river to-day. She will open her purse when she comes in sight of the ferry. But I will go to see her to-morrow. You will call and tell her in the morning, and I shall be much obliged to you."

Carmi shook his head. "Not if there isn't a letter for her, Mr. Chesterfield, so don't ask me. There's trouble enough i' t' world without callin' an' asking for it. Her long tongue an' her short temper they give me the pip, they do for sure."



The padre was in great good humour. He grasped the postman's shoulder with his right hand and stretched out his left arm as he quoted :

“ ‘ Have I not in a pitched battle heard  
Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpet's clang ?  
And do you tell me of a woman's tongue ? ’ ”

“ I am sure you will do me this service, my friend. You will open the door just a little way, and when you have shouted my message you shall pull it to again, and run like a hare. And I have good hopes that the pip will not overtake you.”

What was perhaps intended for a smile made a crease or two in the postman's cheeks, and a kind of grunt indicated his assent.

“ It'll be all right as usual for Saturday, sir ? ” he inquired as he turned to leave.

“ At seven o'clock, prompt,” replied the padre. “ ‘ Two clever vagabonds of the eighteenth century.’ You will let all our friends know ? ”

“ I'll see about it,” said Carmi.

“ Mrs. Thorn,” said the padre when we were alone, as we thought, “ is one of those poor souls whose virtues are as hard to find as gold in the spar. Indeed, you might almost wonder if they exist at all. But she is an ailing woman, and one must make many allowances. One must be a little blind to her faults.”

“ Mrs. Jasper Thorn,” said a voice behind us, “ is the most disagreeable, ungrateful, unlovable old woman in existence, *I* think. She has a spiteful tongue ; she makes the life of her niece unbearable ; she acts as if she were conferring a favour by accepting your kindnesses ; and to fill up the cup of her iniquity she is

actually rude to father himself. I don't understand why you continue to bother with her."

For the first time I saw the padre's face become stern.

"Doris, my child, I am sorry you have said that, even though it were all true. And it was not your real self that was speaking ; you were not quite sincere. If Mrs. Thorn should need you, you would go to her at once, of your own accord, and you would do your best for her, because you know that it is the sick who need ministering to. Mrs. Thorn is sick, and the bodily ailment is not the worst part of her sickness. If her wounds have made her sore we will pour in oil and wine and bind them up for pity's sake, asking nothing again."

Doris rubbed her cheek upon his once more and said :

"So we will, father, and especially one of us. And we will pay our twopence with cheerfulness, and submit to be snubbed without murmuring, and have all the refuse of the neighbourhood emptied upon us without protesting, because we have such tender hearts and funny ideas of service. However, you may take her some queen-cakes when you go to-morrow, and if I'm feeling particularly good and meek I will go to see her myself before long."

"May I go with you to-morrow?" I asked the padre.

"If Sandy will take us," he replied. "It is too far for you to walk."

## CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH WIDOW THORN GETS ON MY NERVES, AND  
THE PADRE GETS ON FANNY'S

**I** THOUGHT I was to be balked of my trip when I heard the rain coming down in torrents during the night, but it was only an unusually heavy thunder-shower, and when the sun came out at an early hour he lost no time in drying the tears from Nature's face, so that she was all smiles and gaiety when we set out on our journey.

How fresh was the smell of the earth, and how sweet the perfumed air of the moors ! I looked about me as we drove slowly along and pitied all poor souls who on this glorious day were dwellers in cities or attics or other prison houses ; and I'm afraid I felt pleased with myself as if I were a person of superior intelligence who had deliberately chosen the better part, whereas I was a mere novice at the game of enjoying life.

Moreover my conceptions were faulty. We passed very few houses on our way to Heatherdyke, but those we did see looked so peaceful in the bright sunshine that it was not unnatural to put a mental halo about their occupants and envy them their placid, contented lives. The cattle lying in the lush grass around the farmsteads turned their heads lazily in our direction as we passed, and their thoughtful eyes seemed to say



that they saw nothing enviable there. Children ran up to the carriage and walked by our side, for Sandy was trudging along at the pony's head, and their rosy good-natured faces shone with contentment as the padre talked to them. We met only two wayfarers of older years and both were cheery—one of them was even jocular—and these things combined to deepen the impression that the Garden of Eden had been reconstructed in these moorland solitudes, and that those who lived in it had not come to grief over any forbidden fruit. I was to be undeceived.

Heatherdyke village is no great distance from Overburn, but it bears no resemblance to its neighbour. It is a green spot in the very heart of the moors, where the gurgling little stream which has the impudence to call itself a river fuses into the uppermost of the three great reservoirs and is temporarily lost. On the hillside is a fine old manor house whose walls were ablaze with a scarlet creeper; there is an unpretentious, lonely-looking church, very small but very conspicuous, so that "out-of-sight, out-of-mind," cannot be pleaded by the villagers to excuse non-attendance; there is a background of welcome trees and a cluster of houses—nothing more. The great highway from Spa to Abbeyvale passes through the village, and as we turned on to a by-road a coach and four rattled past us in grand style. Trippers!

Mrs. Thorn's home out-Edened Eden. Picture a little white house—really white, and not merely of courtesy—set down at the top of a garden which was not large but filled from end to end with flowers of every hue. It was indeed more than full, for the smaller plants had broken bounds and climbed up the low boundary walls, where they stood or lay, masses

or isolated spots of colour, along the entire length. Roses clung around the window and hung over the porch; fuchsias and geraniums peeped through the curtained windows which were tightly closed—it was a sight for men and angels, and it deepened my paradise feeling appreciably.

A sad, unhealthy-looking young woman, whose name was Jane, and who was the dependent niece, nurse and maid-of-all-work of Widow Thorn, opened the door to us; and Eden receded.

We entered at once a moderately large living-room, in which a four-poster bed of antique design took up far more space than could be conveniently spared. Some antique dealer will give a good sum for that bed one of these days. The furniture was old and substantial, and there was evidence enough of material comfort, and of scrupulous and even finical cleanliness. Newspapers were spread over the horizontal parts of the kitchen range, and more than once during our short visit Jane was instructed to remove dust which was supposed to have accumulated on one place or other.

Mrs. Thorn herself was in bed, wrapped in a plaid shawl, and propped up with pillows. On a table near by stood a huge medicine bottle, a tumbler and spoon. The lady's face was sharp and acid-looking.

"Oh, you 'ave come, 'ave you?" she said by way of greeting. "It's a mercy you've found me breathin'. I were at t' last gasp many a time in t' night; I never thought I should ha' seen t' mornin'. But t' poor may wait. If I'd lived up at t' Manor you'd ha' been here i' quick-sticks. Who've you brought wi' you?"

The deficiency of breath must have been remedied,

for there was no lack now or during the rest of our visit. The padre introduced me, and I was directed to take a chair, and dismissed from further notice after one critical judgment. "He none looks that 'ealthy 'imself, doesn't t' lad. I'm down about that sort of a colour; an' they're snapped off at all ages—they are that."

During the next half-hour—for we stopped as long—Eden disappeared like a dissolving view and Avernus took its place. I heartily believe that nothing but the breeziness of the padre kept the smell of sulphur from my nostrils; but he was absolutely unmoved.

Doris's description, albeit it had called forth a rebuke, had been the very cream of charity. It is impossible to convey any impression of what we had to listen to from that woman's lips, as she poured out vitriolic complaints of the neglect of the parson and the doctor, the indifference of her neighbours, and the stupidity and incompetence of her niece. A hosepipe connected with the wells of Baku could not have poured sufficient oil on such troubled waters.

The way the padre dealt with her was a revelation of the man's spirit and resources. His honey was as inexhaustible as her vinegar, but there was good, strong medicine mixed with it. He condoled with her, coaxed, scolded, ridiculed by turns; but with no apparent result.

"Anyhow the doctor visits you regularly," he said in his usual hearty way; "and he has brought you a great bottle of medicine."

"He's done naught o' t' sort," she jerked. "I'd be sorry to drink the muck 'e puts into 'is silly little bottles. I should ha' been feedin' t' worms long since if I'd swallowed 'is concoctions. What's a young



fella like 'im know about a' inside like mine ? Jones's ' 'Lixir o' Life ' 'as always done for me, an' when it fails I shall ha' finished."

The padre removed the cork from the bottle and took a sniff of the contents ; then tipped it on to a finger which he applied to his tongue.

" My dear Mrs. Thorn," he said, as he replaced the cork ; " it is nasty enough to do you a great deal of good. Now tell me, what did the doctor say when he called just now ? "

" What did 'e say ! What does 'e always say ? I take no notice of 'is gibberish ; talkin' Miss Nancy as if 'e was a dancin'-master. I don't know what I 'ave 'im for—a lad 'at knows as much about doctorin' as that buffet. 'E reckons I might last months yet." She groaned, as though the suggested extension of lease was an intolerable thought.

" He is a clever young man——" began the padre, but the lady interrupted him.

" Jane, will you put that table-cloth straight, or willn't you ? 'Ow in the world you can sit there on a Friday mornin' twiddlin' your thumbs while t' cloth's all slanty-ways caps me. I couldn't ha' done it ; but becos I'm lyin' 'elpless i' bed t' place must be like a pig-sty. If I 'adn't t' patience o' Job I should go out o' my 'ead. Layin' sufferin' 'ere is bad enough to bide without 'avin' that on t' top of it. I 'ope the Lord'll take me afore t' place gets fair offaled."

I am afraid it was my elbow that had slightly disarranged the cover on which my arm had been resting, but I removed the offending member, and Jane remedied matters without impatience or any other emotion.

The padre offered to pray before taking leave, and a curt " please yourself " gave the necessary permission.

When we got outside again I knew what Dante felt like when he had climbed out of his *Inferno*.

We extended our drive a little and passed a blacksmith's shop and cottage which stood by the roadside some distance farther on. The smith, a stalwart, good-looking man not much past his prime, was standing at the door, hammer in hand, and he greeted us civilly.

"I have a great pity in my soul for that man," the padre said when we were out of earshot. "Some day I will tell you his story, but not now. He is a splendid animal, but he is not a good man, and I am sorry for him."

"The serpent is still in Eden," I remarked, and the padre placed his hand upon my knee.

"But God can outwit the devil," he said, "and that is why I never lose hope. I try to understand these people in order to help them, and I often succeed. I understand Mrs. Thorn, for instance, but John Boyle I do not understand. I try to be his friend, but I fear I make no headway. That is enough for to-day; my friend, we have dwelt too long in the shadows this morning; we will get back into the sunshine."

When we reached home we found the queen-cakes still in the carriage, to my secret satisfaction. But Doris was sarcastic.

The great event of the week took place on the Saturday. The padre's dining-room is really a big kitchen with a smaller one opening out of it; and a very cosy and comfortable apartment it is. It is low, and the ceiling is composed of varnished boards which catch and reflect the glow of the fire, and the walls are covered with varnished paper which has mellowed to the tint of the ceiling. A red linoleum, bearing a cheerful

design in quiet colours, conceals the stone floor, and a huge oriental rug lies upon the hearth. In the deep recess of the long, narrow window there is a crowded collection of flowering plants, and as these block a good deal of light the lamp has to be lit early, and on special occasions the assistance of a couple of candles on the high mantelpiece is requisitioned.

There are other ornaments on the shelf—treasures dear to the padre's heart—cracked plates, wonderfully cemented together; equestrian figures representing historical characters; and the like.

Above the mantelpiece there hangs a clock with a large dial and an important tick; and on the shelves around the room there are other antiquated and discoloured pieces of china for the chastening of those who covet such things. There is not much furniture beyond the sideboard and table, so that there is ample room for a circle of chairs round the fire.

The resources of the kitchen being insufficient for extraordinary occasions, chairs had to be brought in from other rooms, and the padre himself superintended the arrangements. He was manifestly looking forward to the evening with pleasurable excitement, and he communicated his high spirits to us all, and particularly to Fanny, the little maid whose services are available for a certain number of hours daily, but who goes home to sleep with her mother in the village.

I call her "little," but she is big and bouncing for her fourteen years, and painfully conscious that her legs shoot much too far below her frock. Two thick plaits of hair hang down her back, and prove a constant temptation to the master of the house who employs them as weapons of offence. For the rest, she is ruddy of face, quick of foot and anxious to please.



"Do I put this one for Mr. Rhodes, sir?" she inquired, as she set down a high-backed arm-chair on the far side of the hearth.

"Ah, you are a smart lassie," the padre replied; "you have kept your eyes open and that is good. Now if you put all the big chairs in their right order I will give you a threepenny-bit for your Missionary box. You have not got a Missionary box? Dear, dear! that is an oversight which must be remedied to-morrow. However, you shall please yourself what you do with the money."

Thus stimulated Fanny became the immediate prey of doubts and fears. She seized the rocking-chair and hesitated, one finger in the corner of her mouth.

"Old Jake Robi'son sits in t' rocking-chair, doesn't he?" she said.

That was more than a leading question, but the padre's rules were not Draconian.

"You are quite right, my child," he said. "Jake sits in the rocking-chair, but what you have got to decide is where the rocking-chair sits."

The little maid looked at the other corner of the hearth and then into her master's eyes. What she read there must have been encouraging for she pushed the chair without further delay to the near end of the grate.

"I was just trying to think who sits i' this one, fair i' t' front o' t' fire," she next remarked, with her hand upon one of the upholstered chairs from the drawing-room. She was pretending to think aloud, but the furtive way in which she eyed the padre indicated the direction of her hopes. "I believe it's Mr. Fletcher."

The padre coughed but said nothing. His eyes were fixed on vacancy.

"No, it isn't Mr. Fletcher," she corrected. "I remember now, it's Mr. Clark, t' schoolmaster," and the chair was wheeled to its position in triumph.

I thought she would come to grief at the last hurdle. Only two easy chairs were left, for the smaller ones might be occupied indiscriminately, but whether Farmer Jackson or Mr. Fletcher sat on the schoolmaster's left, Fanny was totally unable to decide. Her uncertainty was painful, and the presence of mother and Doris now added to her embarrassment.

"I'm bothered if I know whether Mr. Fletcher sits o' this side or t' other," she soliloquized.

"We have to arrange our seats with an eye to the special requirements of our guests, Mrs. Dallinger," said the padre. "Mr. Fletcher, for instance, is an elderly man who suffers from rheumatism, and has to be careful of draughts——"

"Oh, I know," Fanny exclaimed. "Mr. Fletcher sits o' t' other side between schoolmaster an' Mr. Rhodes, an' then he isn't i' t' way o' t' door; and Mr. Jackson sits here i' this."

She placed the two chairs in position and clapped her hands gleefully. "I've put 'em all i' their right order, haven't I?" she inquired, turning to the padre. "I never thought I should ha' managed it, cos I hadn't taken that much notice."

The padre examined the position of the chairs, drew out his purse, and placed the coin in her outstretched palm.

The room was arranged long before the hour of arrival, and the semicircle was enlarged to make room for my chair. It was a feast of reason from which the ladies were excluded.

## CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH THE PADRE'S STUDY CIRCLE IS DESCRIBED

NOT many days have passed, but I must have reproduced the scene in the padre's kitchen a hundred times or more, and always with pleasure. I took no part in the conversation that night, but I have questioned and cross-questioned the actors since, and debated hotly with them, when no spoken words have passed my lips. If any man want an insight into the character of his neighbours let him ask them to his home and make them feel that it is Liberty Hall, as the padre does.

That is the recipe and easily given, but without the padre's bonhomie it cannot be properly dispensed. There was a shade of difference in the greetings he extended, as for instance to the schoolmaster and the postman, who arrived together a few minutes before the hour; it was more marked, perhaps, in the case of old Jake; and I tried to analyse it. Somehow or other I felt as I sat there by the side of Carmi in the second seat from the fire that the atmosphere was full of electric thrills of life, and that the very bearing of the host was a weighty lesson in itself—a lesson, if you like, in collecting and controlling human energies and making them magnetic.

Instinctively he knew how to set each man at ease as he entered. His condescension was so great as to



pass absolutely unnoticed, and within a very few minutes most of the men had drawn pipes from their pockets and begun to smoke, though several of the younger ones had brought exercise books, and used their pencils diligently throughout the address.

I suppose I should have found something to record if the company had included no more than the eight or ten who were present when the padre at length took his seat by old Jake and cleared his throat for the opening remarks. But the record would not have been the same; and as it seems to me, though this is a surmise, I admit, it could not have been so vitally interesting.

It was the arrival of two late-comers that diverted what promised to be a quiet stream into a turbulent torrent, the noise and splash of which still affect my dreams.

One of the men—unexpected and unwelcome, as I gathered from the meaning glances that circulated as he entered—was John Boyle, the blacksmith; his companion was my old acquaintance, Tom of the Pig. They received from their host the same courteous treatment as the rest, with the addition of what seemed strangely like deference (yet not that surely!) in the case of Tom.

When they were seated the padre plunged at once into his subject.

I need not say much about it, nor about the speaker. He dealt with the life and work of Goldsmith and Burns, and the address, admirable in itself and admirably delivered, was listened to with close attention by all except old Jake, who speedily succumbed to the warmth and ease of the chimney corner. There was no attempt at oratory, yet at times the padre's

eyes flashed, and the words rushed from his lips in a flood of unstudied eloquence. His gestures were easy and expressive, and some of the men never removed their eyes from his face.

I sat back and looked at him, as I look at him now. Through the window behind him I caught sight now and again of the reddening sky, as the sun sank to the cushioned moors. Outside, the shadows lengthened, and within the room they danced fantastically upon the varnished walls, and bent and twisted on to the ceiling above. As the darkness came on the lamps burned more brightly, but the flames in the grate still shot out from the heart of the fire, and threw into bold relief the massive outline of the padre's head, and it was their glow that was reflected in his eyes.

How proud I was to be his friend and to know that he was mine! I felt to own him as I have so often felt to own my landscape, and for the same reason—that I knew we were akin. So far as mere facts were concerned he told me nothing that I did not already know, but his large-heartedness and the clearness of his vision stirred my soul. It was life rather than literature—life as revealed in and by literature, that was his concern. These men had a message for him, and it was that message, self-interpreted, that he had to pass on to others. To listen to him was to realise that he was no mere distributor of hastily collected information, but one who had searched in his own treasury and was offering us the choicest product of his thought.

This was the largest indoor assemblage I had ever seen, and that in itself was a novel experience that only one here and there among the countless thousands of earth could understand. I had begun to

hunger and thirst for my fellows, and here was refreshment of some sort—of what sort another hour was to reveal.

What contrasts they were ! The postman : I see him now, indifferent to the cushion which the padre's forethought had provided, leaning forward the whole time, with his head resting upon his left hand, and smoking from a long clay pipe. I don't believe he ever once removed his eyes from the fire until the address had ended ; and if there is anything in mesmerism we ought to have had proof of it in his person. To me his face was speechless.

I summon the schoolmaster before me, and there he sits with a face that tells all his secrets. A rough-haired, youngish man he was, who might have seen his fortieth year, and of quick and maybe peevish temper. So I judged that night as his brow contracted into a permanent scowl when the smoke got thicker about him. An enemy of the weed, that schoolmaster, I was sure, and a man with whom irritation was no mere sojourner.

Then there was farmer Jackson, of whom I said to myself that he was an honest man and a loyal friend ; for on his red and cheery face, plain lettered as upon a sign, was the tale of his virtues.

I must not go the whole round of the circle, nor need I do so. It was Tom and the smith who arrested my eye the oftenest. Tom's changing expression betrayed the depth of his feeling, and I know that he lived in the eighteenth century during that hour, and shared the sorrows and the triumphs of the two vagabonds of genius. Did the padre praise them, his whole face lit up with satisfaction ; did he point out their faults, Tom's eyes clouded and his head nodded



in understanding. He caught the first hint of humour, as clear water catches the rays of the emerging sun, and his eyes glistened and his teeth gleamed white. The glow upon his face was conveyed to my heart, which warmed to the man; and I knew instinctively that in him the padre had a friend, stanch and true.

Was John Boyle the villain of the piece? I have asked myself that question more than once, but I am no authority on villains, and cannot take the responsibility of docketing him. I may, however, call him its Mephistopheles, even if that seem a greater abuse of charity, for his expression and his expressions alike were often saturnine. Before the meeting came to an end I found myself prying into mysteries, and asking what "soul of goodness" there could be in such a nature as his, but though I had the will I had not the means nor the opportunity to "distil it out."

I am anticipating. Whenever I call up John Boyle he comes and bends a steady, concentrated look upon the padre that seems as if it would search the speaker's soul. He fascinated me at times that evening. The most forceful or eloquent passages brought no light to his eyes, but a half-smile of contempt greeted every softening of harsh shadows, every extenuation of weakness in creed or conduct. On these occasions he made no effort to conceal his scorn.

It was farmer Jackson who innocently raised the sluice-gate and let loose the flood, by challenging the smith to open the discussion that was to follow the address.

"I can tell you in a few words," replied the smith slowly, "what I think about them two chaps. I'd ha' shoved 'em both up again a wall and emptied lead

into 'em. I say shoot such like rubbish off and be damned to 'em."

Let me change my metaphor—has not some great man spoken slightly of consistency?—it was the sneering, careless defiance of the enemy, as he stood cool and unconcerned in the hostile camp. I was too interested to be indignant; and the padre, I saw, was alert and amused, and his eyes anticipated the joys of battle; but most of those about me took no pains to conceal their indignation.

It was Tom who responded, and his quaint drawl awakened old memories at once. "Nay, smith," he said, "but there's lots o' good stuff found in t' muck, as t' throstle said to t' worm."

"Then I'd do what t' throstle did—kill it off," he replied. "I'd take such loafers as them we've been hearing about, an' you with 'em, an' shoot 'em off, an' breed a better set, if I'd my way."

I follow it all in my thoughts, and every word comes back to me with such startling clearness sometimes that I can hardly believe that the voices are but echoes in my soul. After all, are they not more than echoes? Is there not in the complex mechanism which is ME a plastic something which receives impressions and records them more faithfully if less mechanically than any phonograph? More faithfully! Yes, for do not these records of mine conjure up for me the lineaments of those who speak as well as the spoken word? Do they not yield up the very spirit of the speaker, as no echo can?

I call up the smith, and he sits before my eyes, and in his cold but steady voice repeats his heartless creed; the creed of a hard but thoughtful man.

Is there anything in it? Are all vagabonds wasters

for whom the world has no use? "Poetry and play-writing" may be nice and pretty, but so is the scum that settles on the top of a stagnant pond, which, beautiful as it is, is yet poison and in these days must be cleared away. The smith was Procrustes, and upon his bed he stretched all who came across his path, and woe betide those tramps and strolling-players, those favourites of genius or of fortune, whose measurements varied from that standard. One fate awaited them all—those who killed time with the pen and those who killed pheasants with the gun—though he considerably allowed a choice of exits into the outer darkness: a short shrift and a long rope, or an ounce of lead.

"Cruel; horribly cruel"—that was the horrified verdict of most of his auditors, but the smith would have none of it.

"Cruel!" he said; "it 'ud be kindness for t' country. I'stead o' that you encourage the lazy devils an' they breed an' breed again, and in a 'under'd years 'ow many poets an' noble thinkers 'ave you got out o' the lot, think ye? You've ninety-nine per cent. filling your gaols an' workuses, or idling on t' land; that's what you've got."

Tom and the schoolmaster, though they used different weapons and attacked him from different sides, were his chief antagonists, but he treated both with equal contempt. To say that he had the courage of his convictions is to say little, for that kind of courage is often its own paymaster and no niggard either, but it is fair to say that his convictions were real.

"Look here!" he said, on one occasion, bringing down his hand upon his knee in angry emphasis. "It 'ud pay you chaps better to think for yourselves i'stead o' paying



geniuses to think for you." There was a fine scorn in his voice as he said it. " You'd see then 'at you ought to deal wi' wasters i' men same as you deal wi' 'em in poultry or cattle or aught else 'at you want to raise for a prize. Chuck 'em on t' waste-eap. Even t' bees does it, and t' ants. If t' blight gets into your plants you'd burn 'em—choose 'ow pretty they looked—but you let your blighted wastrel bring a dozen more into t' world, till t' land stinks wi' 'em. Cruel! I tell you it's kindness, and you're all too daft to see it. Weed out your wastrels, whether they're poets or parsons, squires or tramps, and in a 'under'd years time we shall be a nation o' men."

Whatever soul of goodness there might or might not be in the smith there was surely a soul of truth in his creed. The fault was that, I fear, of most creeds; it was too iron-bound and inflexible. I knew the padre could have answered him, but the padre was silent. The schoolmaster was voluble enough, but in his way was as unconciliatory as the smith, and his arguments touched no chord that vibrated in my soul; but it was far different with Tom. His words come to me now, fresh as the zephyrs that enter my attic room in the cool of this summer evening. They revealed the man to me—and the revelation grows clearer as I bend my thoughts upon him.

It was an old story I suppose to most of them: how he had resisted the best efforts of " the old man " and the schoolmaster to " break him in "; and how the mystery of his nature offered a constant puzzle to his brain. But he had read in God's open book and the lesson he had learned was not that of the smith.

" Smith 'ud 'ave us all after 'is pattern," he drawled, with that mixture of humour and pathos that I vainly

strive to suggest ; “ but Him ’at set things movin’ didn’t build ’em ’i that way. Smith ’ud shoot off them ’at makes pictur’s wi’ pens an’ paint-brushes, but God made buttercups as well as bees, an’ He made music afore He made men. Smith says He didn’t, but I say He did. It’s in t’ wind ; it’s in t’ water ; it’s among t’ leaves o’ t’ trees ; it’s in t’ song o’ t’ birds. An’, mind ye, God meant t’ music to live. Smith could crush t’ lark, but he couldn’t kill its song, ’cos it’s ’ere ” ; (he placed his hand on his breast) “ an’ men was made to sing, too, an’ to paint pictur’s, an’ write books, thank God, an’ they’re not wasters, them aren’t.”

Tom’s convictions were as strong as the smith’s and they were more attractive, so that most of the men smiled encouragement, yet there was surely a kindly irony in that which followed.

“ Smith says we’re goin’ to t’ dogs, but I know we should get there a lot sooner if ’e ’ad ’is way. He’d crush all t’ bit o’ poetry out of us, an’ all t’ music, an’ just build up wer muscle, an’ put us an inch or two more round t’ chest, an’ then ’ang prize-cards round wer necks, an’ medals on wer watch-chains, an’ set all t’ other animals laughin’ at us. ‘ Goin’ to t’ dogs ! ’ They wouldn’t look at us, smith. They could beat us at wer own game, if that wor our game. Who’d run again a ’are, or pull again a ’orse, or wrestle wi’ a bear ? It isn’t man’s work, smith lad, that isn’t.”

As I listened to Tom I knew even before he told us—for he did tell us—that he had somehow found the secret of happiness though he did not understand it all. With nothing in his pocket he was happier, I imagine, than any fabled king. The one thing that troubled him was that he himself was of no use in the

world; and the antidote, the hope that one day he, like Bunyan and Burns, might find out what God had made him for.

"Write a poetry-book, or summat o' that sort, I reckon," sneered the smith.

"I try now and again," replied Tom, without noticing the sneer; "it's in here, lad," striking his breast, "but I cannot allus put words to what I feel. 'Appen I shall do i' now, but I'm a waster, right enough, an' ye may be right about t' gun i' my case."

He rose and went up to Mr. Chesterfield. "I shall 'ave to go, sir. Thank ye: it's been grand. I shall feed on it for a month."

The padre pressed him to remain for coffee but he excused himself, nodded to the company and was about to leave the room when I called out "Good-night, Tom." He turned and walked up to me with a smile of recognition.

"Lord love ye, sir," he said as he held out his hand, "I've been tryin' to put a label to ye all t' night, but yer voice gave you away as t' fox said to t' cockeril. Poor Sangwidge! do you remember 'im? 'E's changed 'is name to 'ome-fed.' 'E's same as lots more, poets an' cetery, he's like to be more thowt on at after e's dead nor ever he wor when livin'. So long, sir, an' God bless ye."

The blacksmith looked up at the clock and rose too, but the postman, noticing the movement said, "Bide your time, Jack. I want a word with you," and he sat down again, but would neither eat nor drink when refreshments were passed round.

With what pleasure I recall the scene that followed the withdrawal of the ladies, when the postman uncloaked himself and won my heart! I see him now



as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe with some deliberation and then turned towards the smith and began to speak. With the utmost coolness and no sign of bitterness he told him that he had known him all his life, as he had known Tom Bird, and that he—John Boyle—was the bigger wastrel of the two.

He took no notice of any of us as he proceeded. It was a calm, well-reasoned summing up of the case that would have done credit to a judge, and it was given judicially. He paid tribute to the smith's skill and industry—there was no better man at his job in the Riding—but the tale of his virtues ended there.

"T' machine part of you goes wonderful well, but t' man part of you goes just about as wrong as it can go. You're a perpendic'lar donkey ingine, if a name 'as to be put to you," he said, without a trace of emotion; "an' it isn't good enough for a man. Look you 'ere, smith"—he grasped the bowl of his pipe and pointed the stem in the direction of Mr. Boyle—"yon poor lad 'at's just left has a heart, an' a man's heart. He's a hewman being wi' all his faults, an' a fav'rite wi' everybody near-hand. Who's a good word to say for you, Jack, apart from your work?"

I held my breath; I looked at the smith. His mouth was tightly closed; his eyes were hard; his expression supercilious.

The expression on Carmi's face never changed. After a pause he told us that Tom had walked six miles to hear the address, and had the same distance to cover before he finished. The smith interrupted to assert with a sneer that he would sleep the better for it, and the postman checkmated him. "He won't sleep at all *this* night," he said.

I wonder if anybody else felt the thrill of the situation

as I did. Perhaps not, for they had lived in the world a long time; I alone of all the company was an apprentice to life. Inwardly I laughed and cried as Carmi told how Tom had gone to the help of the helpless. Some man whom they all knew, Levi Turner by name, "another o' them 'at smith 'ud practise on wi' his gun," had broken down again and there was no doubt that it was consumption this time, and the end of things. He was a market gardener, I gathered, and could be ill spared from his work, especially as his family was large and increasing, the "annual baby" having arrived only the previous week.

Tom had gone there the moment he had heard of the predicament, not stopping to consider that it was this man who had set his dog at him not very long before. All that had concerned him was that a neighbour's trade was in jeopardy; that the neighbour himself was in trouble and needed the help he could give. In Carmi's word he had gone "an' worked like a black in t' daytime, an' stopped up wi' t' poor fellow t' best part o' t' night, seein' 'at t' missus couldn't," and it was to continue this work of mercy that he had now departed.

The postman drove home the moral of it.

"That's why I call 'im a man i'stead of an ingine. That's where you fail, smith. If Tom had ha' been shot there's lots besides Levi 'at 'ud ha' come short."

He paused and everything was so silent that the ticking of the clock sounded unpleasantly loud. Then the smith spoke. He was as cool as his antagonist and quite unmoved by his narration.

"It's a waste o' breath arguing wi' you, Carmi. A bit o' softness runs away wi' all your common-sense. T' best way for t' next generation is to snuff out all

t' Toms an' Levis i' this, or else in a bit there'll be half a dozen idle Toms sitting up wi' t' same number o' consumptive Levis."

My spirits sank again. There was a measure of truth, I repeated, in what the smith had said, and I should have dwelt upon the thought and pursued it, no doubt, if the postman had given me time. He was not at all disturbed—it seemed to me that nothing could disturb him—and I leaned towards him in my eagerness to catch his reply.

"If you see a cog lying beside t' machine," he said in his level voice; "and it doesn't chance to fit where *you* think it owt to go an' want to put it, you'd scrap it—chuck it in t' melting-pot. It 'ud pay you better to find out what part o' t' machine him 'at built it meant t' cog to go into. Yon poor lad hasn't found 'is place yet, but he'd be sore missed round this neighb'rhood, I can tell you, an' I know nob'dy 'at 'ud shed a tear for you, Jack."

"I don't want their tears," said the smith as he rose to go. "What you say is just t' sort o' sentimental twaddle they teach i' churches. There'll be no progress made till we get rid o' softness."

It was the padre's custom to pray with us each night before we retired. On this occasion we sat around the dying fire in the kitchen when the company had gone, and talked over the events of the evening. Then we knelt, and the padre led us to the Throne of God. There was one petition in his prayer that I shall not soon forget.

"And Father—Thou who dost guide the wild water-fowl to his nest among the rushes, guide Tom Bird to the place where Thou would'st have him be."



## CHAPTER XVII

### IN WHICH THE DOCTOR RECOMMENDS ME TO ERECT A NOTICE BOARD

THE doctor read my Overburn narrative very deliberately it seemed to me, and he toyed with his cigar as if he were afraid he might never get another.

"What's the matter with my fist?" I inquired. "I haven't written in cipher or hieroglyphics, have I?"

He looked steadily at me, and the smoke curled up to the ceiling. Then his eyes wandered to the walls. "They've made a very decent job of this room," he remarked; "as a mummy-case it has its points. Mummies were put into cases, weren't they?"

For some reason I was irritable and replied, "Oh, hang the mummies! You haven't answered my question."

"No," he said, returning to the manuscript and frowning a little. "It is really hieroglyphic, which seems appropriate in a way. The fact is, when you have to read what isn't there as well as what is it runs away with time. I was just considering certain hitherto unforeseen complications in this scheme of life, and trying to see my way. What are you going to do about the girl? It hadn't occurred to me that when you awoke from sleep you might find your Eve. It's rather the deuce, you know."

"Latin, *Deus*, God," I replied in the same vein, and shrugged my shoulders. "Have not the gods always sported with men? But seriously, my dear doctor, do you take me for a fool?"

It is impossible to ruffle this man. "I'm not sure," he said. "I don't know where the fool ends and the wise man begins. Most men, don't you think, are part fool? and you—excuse me, I know this is heresy—are young, very human, and——"

"Green!" I suggested, as he hesitated.

"Well, that will do," he assented, "though I should probably have said emotional. You are undeniably inexperienced."

I remembered Doris's blush and smiled. "And you," I returned with what was meant for dry sarcasm, "are a bachelor. There are no houris in your Paradise."

He raised his eyebrows and sniffed. "I smell fish: is it a red herring?" he said.

I regained a little of my good humour. "My remark was pertinent, though it was also, perhaps, impertinent. I often wonder why you haven't married. *You* are not a mummy and a prisoner. There are objections to unmarried medicals, don't you know?"

"One that eligible unmarried women seem to share in my case," he answered caustically. "The women who might have made me happy have been marked 'All Rights Reserved' before I appeared upon the scene. Now I am case-hardened and must just get on as well as I can in spite of the disapproval of the public. But you——"

"Yes?"

He tossed the stump of his cigar into the fire, and rising stood with his back to the grate.

"Be careful. It's a risky game playing at sweet-

hearts, and there's the girl to be considered as well as yourself. I think you would do well to keep your heart 'a garden walled round,' and to put a notice-board up, 'No road this way.' It's rotten luck, I admit, but it's better than having a lot of irreparable damage done."

He spoke earnestly and seemed really sorry, and instead of becoming angry or ironical I smiled.

"I thought Love was supposed to laugh at locksmiths," I said. "However, you needn't worry. You've come across an exceptionally level-headed couple this time. The wall is there and the sign-board too, and we stand just beneath it and lean our arms on the coping and talk away as sensibly as you could wish. I'm not such a big fool after all, you see."

I thought he ought to have looked more relieved than he did, but when these middle-aged fellows get an idea into their heads they are as reluctant to part with it as with a front tooth. He was still looking at me thoughtfully when Harriet interrupted us with the information that the doctor was wanted at the telephone, and my companion made an abrupt departure.

"Keep the board legible," he threw at me as he closed the door.

I was annoyed, for Irving had proposed to spend the evening with me, and now after a bare half-hour I could hear the diminuendo of his footsteps on the gravel, and knew there was little likelihood that he would return.

I longed for company and none was available. Dad was out, and mother was entertaining the curate's wife, who was a notorious long stopper. The kiddie would be in bed, and Pimple, unfortunately, could not be summoned by telephone. I should obviously have



to make the most of myself, as had been the case thousands of times before.

The sun had set, but the after-glow remained, and in the warm half-light of evening the landscape nestled against the distant haze, like a drowsy child in the shawled arms of its nurse. The paths along the river banks were dotted with couples; young folk taking their fill of life after the grey duties of the day. Was it unnatural that envy should have crept from her hiding place and endeavoured to poison the cup of my delight? I am human after all; had I no right to rebel that I should have to walk all my days with shackled feet; that whilst others might run and leap and throw themselves upon their beds at last, to rise a few hours later refreshed and strengthened, I could have less real liberty than many a slave? A company of young people passed along the lane almost at my feet—youths and maidens in high spirits, moving to the music of laughter, and unconscious of the effort of movement. They were on their way to the Bastion, and in a few minutes would be looking down from a height five hundred feet above my head. I pictured them, laughing amongst themselves at their loud heart-beats, the insignificant embarrassments of a moment, and then racing each other with rosy cheeks and quickened pulse but with never a thought of danger to the very top; whereas if I were to run forward to catch the stick I had tossed into the air, as one hatless youth had just done, I should pay the extreme penalty of rashness. How could I help it if I felt thus! It was Irving's fault, or the fault of that stupid patient of his who had probably been eating coco-nuts at the feast.

I turned away and sat down in the shadows, but envy

came with me and rested on the arm of my chair and continued to whisper in my ear. The fire was low, for no fire was needed, but I put some coal on for the sake of destroying something and leaned forward and let my false friend talk.

My back was to the moors, but my heart faced them. I wonder how it is that the moors call so loudly and tug so hard at one's heart-strings! Scores, hundreds (for I was in the mood for exaggeration) of young fellows of my age, I grumbled to myself, would at that moment be rambling upon them. They would reach the very heart of the heath where I had never been: where I could never go. Not more than an hour ago some of them would have seen an ocean of heather, deeply billowed and surging to the horizon miles away, glow with the smokeless heat of subterranean fires, as the sun plunged in the west. Why should such experiences have been denied to me, and what merit was there in being patient and contented!

Envy, however, got no farther than my elbow. After all, even if I discount my mummy chronometry heavily, I have lived long enough to learn the folly of kicking against the pricks.

Perhaps the thought of Doris helped me. I have got into the way of asking myself how she would look at things, and it always steadies me. She is the very incarnation of common-sense, and the best companion and adviser a fellow in my position could wish for. If there were any of the sentimental risks Irving anticipates so gloomily I should see them instantly; but Doris, thank goodness, is quite wide awake. I knew what she would have said to me in my present mood, and the look that would have come to her face, and I showed envy the door at the very moment that it

opened to admit Pimple. In what speedy fashion do the gods reward virtue!

All the same, Pimple's visit did not make me exactly hilarious; on the contrary I felt disturbed after he had left. He has been selected as one of the men to carry out a contract job that his boss has got somewhere in the Midlands and he expects to be away several weeks. He brought back the books I had lent him and borrowed two volumes of Mazzini, Rosebery's Pitt and Gardiner's Cromwell.

"It isn't very light stuff," I remarked, "for lonely evenings. Hadn't you better thin it out a bit? There's a lot of sixpennies in the cupboard; if you care to make a selection you needn't bring them back."

He shook his head. "I want something to make me think," he said; "to take me out o' myself."

Some things in Carlyle had puzzled him, and we chatted for perhaps an hour, and I did my best to unbar a few gates for him to his evident gratification.

He looked older and more harassed than formerly, but I did not remark upon it, feeling that he would open his heart to me before he left. I was not mistaken. He told me that the desire and indeed the determination to avenge his mother had become an obsession. He knows it is wrong, and it is no use quoting Scripture, for he will anticipate you and almost eagerly turn the weapon against himself. He has given up his Sunday School class because he had yielded to the temptation to buy a revolver and that meant, as he put it, that he "had to choose between God an' t' gun, and t' gun got it."

"I'm stalled o' waiting," he said. "Do you know what I've found out, sir? He 'asn't married that woman, but they've got a little lad, seven years old



now. I've 'eard parsons say 'at the Lord works wi' human instruments, and He'll work wi' me one o' these days. I feel it coming."

I got the weapon from him on the distinct understanding that I would give it up without demur whenever he should demand it; but I feel very troubled about Pimple, and should like to tell the padre about him and ask his advice. One of these days I shall do so, but I cannot just now because I am putting my inclinations in fetters and avoiding the Overburn road.

When Harriet came in with my supper tray I condoled with her on account of Pimple's departure. She took it very calmly, however, and I felt almost nettled.

"When a girl has a 'friend,' Harriet," I said, "I should suppose that her thoughts would sometimes turn in the direction of matrimony. You seem rather indifferent. Do you imagine that you could continue to love Pimple if there were no prospect of his ever being able to marry you?"

Harriet knows her mind though she expresses it diffidently. "Ee, you do ask funny questions, Miss Trichud," she said. "I don't think I could 'elp likin' Pimple choose whether I was to marry 'im or no. It's same as a seizure, love is; you 'ave to 'ave it when it comes. By what I can make out gettin' married cures lots o' folks."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN WHICH I LOSE MY BALANCE AND DAD UNDERTAKES A RAILWAY CONTRACT

**I**T took me a week or more to settle down to my old life, that is to say to the routine of the pre-Overburn days. I was as restless as a cork in a whirlpool, and could settle to nothing. My thoughts refused to busy themselves with newspaper diet, and fed on Peggs and Thorns and Boyles and certain grapes—not altogether sour—that grew at Overburn. It was all very childish, no doubt, but not, perhaps, unnatural under the circumstances, and after a while I found my feet and set to work to map out for myself a career of usefulness. That was one of the results of my visit. I felt that if I was to live at all I must live to some purpose ; but I hesitate to commit my map to paper lest the mountains should bring forth mice.

It was not quite a blank week, though my adventures were of the mildest description. On the Wednesday, for instance, I walked a hundred yards up the lane that leads to the Bastion, and though it is steep and rather rough, I was none the worse for it so far as I could judge. I am beginning to take bigger risks and to assert my authority firmly but temperately over the rebels inside of me.

I had forgotten that it was early-closing day in

Netherleigh until the lane began to get busy, and then I sat down on the bank in the shelter of the hedge and watched the people pass. They were our own folk, altogether unlike the giddy crowd that comes over from Broadbeck and elsewhere on Saturdays, filling the air with shouts and laughter and littering the paths with orange peel. These who crawled slowly past and exchanged glances with me were for the most part staid and middle-aged tradespeople who were taking their pleasure soberly, not to say sadly, and I suspect they climbed the Bastion more from habit than from any compelling desire for spiritual stimulus.

I was lazily speculating on this, and wondering why the stout and short-winded should give themselves so much exertion when I was aroused by a man's voice at my side. Looking up with a slight start I recognised my cobbler friend, Hannibal Wood.

He was neatly dressed and looked quite presentable in spite of his closed eye and hands ingrained with black, and the eye that was on active service blinked and twinkled more humorously than ever.

He sat down beside me "for just an odd minute," and after the first greetings we did not speak until several couples had passed. Then he laughed.

"Eh, it's a sad job, isn't it?" he said. "They're all wed, that lot; no spirit left in 'em. He goes first and she trails after, and when they get home to their teas they'll have had a grand afternoon, and be as cross and touchy as wasps. We've a deal to be thankful for."

He was not warranted, of course, in including me in his pæan of thanksgiving, but I overlooked this and inquired about trade, intimating that I had heard something of the joke he was playing on the public.



He removed his hat and scratched his head before he replied rather ruefully :

“ Well, I don’t deny that there have been times when I’ve had what you might call value out o’ that card, but I doubt I’ll have to take it out afore long.”

“ Because—— ? ” I inquired.

“ Because t’ game’s up. Folks are beginning to find out. Do you happen to know a little body, dressed in spectacles and a rig-out ’at she must have picked up at Madame Tussoo’s—lives somewhere down by the Bridge and might have had getting on for fifty birthdays ? ”

I nodded, recognising Miss Janet’s portrait.

“ Well, she come in the other day to plead wi’ me to take the card out. She blushed and stammered for ten minutes afore she let on what she’d come for, and then she blurted out wi’ tears in her peepies ’at it was wicked to hate people, and shocking to make a boast of it, and would I take it out if she’d promise to bring me all her shoes to mend.”

He looked at me with a wry face, and I smiled encouragingly.

“ I asked her if it wasn’t a bit hard on her own shoemaker, and she said she’d never thought about that, and wouldn’t I remove the card for the principle o’ the thing. She named maybe half a dozen rare good women ’at used to live i’ Jerusalem or somewhere a time back, and said how badly off we should all have been without ’em. I told her what worried me was ’at they’d gone back’ards way so fast since then, and I thought once o’ naming another half-dozen of a different stamp ’at live i’ Netherleigh, but she looked at me so pitiful-like ’at I couldn’t fashion.”

“ And how did it end ? ” I inquired.

Hannibal laughed rather confusedly. "I promised to think it over," he said. "If there's much chance of her coming in again I shall take t' card out. I can't stand nattering at no price."

I was not surprised when I reached home to find that Miss Janet, who had called that afternoon, had given her version of the encounter. Mother and I exchanged notes for our own and dad's gratification.

"You know, dear" (Miss Janet had said), "he is really quite a decent, intelligent sort of man, but peculiar, and I daresay he meant it for a joke. I believe he was quite as frightened of me as I was of him, though my heart beat until I was sure he would hear it. But I felt it my duty, Edith. It seems so wrong to make a boast of hating people, and to put it in a shop window—don't you think so?—and it doesn't make it any better, really, to wrap it up in Latin. Or perhaps it's Greek—I'm sure I don't know. I'm surprised I had the courage, dear, but I reminded him as delicately as I could that he must have had a mother.

"I saw that made an impression and he said he didn't exactly hate women, but they got on his nerves and made him 'all of a tremble.' Wasn't that ridiculous, Edith? I told him how much the world owed to good women; and really he is a very comical man, he said he would try to pay back his little bit by doing his best for their soles. He meant their shoes, of course."

I have formed the Spartan-like resolution to avoid the Overburn route in my excursions for the present, and I have fallen back perforce, though not unwillingly, on the Little Chap.

"Uncle Onry," said he one day, when he was to accompany us, and Sandy and I were discussing the route, "do you fink it would be nice to go to see the lady who gave me the fyowers?"

"No, sonny," I replied, with all the assurance of Ananias; and the sense of guilt was lost in the satisfied reflection that the sect of the Stoics would not fizzle out whilst I lived. I could tell by the way mother kissed the Little Chap that she was pleased with my reply, and somehow that rather annoyed me. If anybody thinks I shall not visit the Chesterfields before long he is mistaken, and meantime there is such an institution as the penny post.

My interest in the kiddie deepens. He is very observant, and there are not many boys of four, I imagine, who can distinguish a swift from a swallow, but he can; and you can almost watch the process as he takes in information and stores it up in his mind. He doesn't forget what he is told, and he has an artless confidence in the veracity of all grown-ups which is not without its dangers.

Dad thinks he wants "shaking up," and until recently he was constantly urging me to do the shaking. The suggestion had its attractions, for somehow the little fellow is able to unloose my mummy-cloths and warm my blood as only one other can. I do not know why the prattle of a child should have this effect upon me, and why the touch of his tiny hand and the play of light and shade in his wistful eyes should thrill me and make life more desirable.

Dad's prediction that the kiddie would develop wings and fly away to a better land before long made me vaguely uneasy, and led me to interview



Mrs. Stafford the other day and offer my services as instructor ; but the result was not encouraging.

She listened very sympathetically and looked so frail and pretty that I never anticipated a refusal, and when it came it was accompanied by so many apologies and explanations, and by such a woeful expression of countenance, that I felt as mean as if I had crushed a butterfly. I came away with the conviction that I had been guilty of a brutal proposition, and that Mrs. Stafford was quite right in declining to force the education of so sensitive a nature as Norman's ; but also with the very strong impression that she would have liked to promise me that if she ever had another little boy it would be her one prayer that he might be so constituted as to enable him to receive the benefit of my tutorship when he should attain the ripe age of four and a half.

Dad was not convinced, of course, and could account for it all in a sentence. "As soon as a pretty mouth begins to pout you're done for, my boy. It's a case of sending one young fool to argue with another. I'll bet I could shake the kid up and make a man of him, whereas his mother and you between you'll turn him into either a girl or an angel."

All this has not much to do with my voyage of life, perhaps, yet it interests me to record how dad endeavoured to illustrate his theory. Dad is a sort of Private Theatrical Company on my boat, and provides the touch of comedy that is necessary to counteract the discouragements of the enterprise.

Twelve months ago dad's opinions on the training of children would not have interested me, but now that I am myself a mixture of all the ages—an old tree

budding afresh—I rather like to hear his views on the treatment of new shoots.

We had been for a drive, and on returning found the dining-room transformed as we thought into a menagerie with dad on all fours playing the part of bear. It was a misapprehension, however, for the rotund and perspiring figure that rose sheepishly to its feet as we entered had been a “twain” it appeared, with Norman for driver.

We discovered by degrees that dad had been determined to put his theory to the test, and knowing the Little Chap’s interest in trains and all that appertained to them, had smuggled into the house a box of mechanical appliances from which engine, carriages, station and signals—in fact an entire railroad system—could be constructed. It was an excellent toy undoubtedly for a boy of ten or so, and with great possibilities in the way of education, but for a kiddie of four and a half——.

I know exactly how the Little Chap looked at it. Hope was in his eyes, held back by uncertainty, for the collection of rods and strips of steel, of screws and cogs, told him nothing. But when he saw the pictures, and it dawned upon him that such desirable order could be produced from the jumbled chaos in the box, his delight knew no bounds.

Dad made his first mistake by suggesting that operations should be conducted on the floor. The kiddie was nothing loth, but dad is a fairly heavy man, and I can imagine how the part of him that gives dignity to advancing years would get in his way when he settled down to work.

It is to his credit that for more than an hour he

stuck manfully to the task of building an engine, though some of the parts did not fit very well, and, if the kiddie is to be believed, dad "talked to them sometimes low down, and was ve'y cwiss with them," and when the locomotive had finally been constructed the perspiring mechanic had had enough. He rose to his feet with difficulty because of his cramped limbs, and suggested that "Uncle Dick or what-you-call-him" would carry out the rest of the contract on some future occasion.

The kiddie's lip quivered, and disappointment spread over his face like a raincloud, and the sound of rain was in his voice as he said, "We have not made any ca'iages, and there are no signals."

Dad read the signs, and in terror lest the storm should break, gave all sorts of promissory notes, pledging "Uncle Thingumy" to make signals, bridges and trucks at an early date, but the shadow did not lift. Dad became uneasy, he was afraid that Norman would cry and that the maids would know of it, and he saw with alarm that the plan he had formed of surprising mother and me by his masterly strategy was in danger of miscarrying. He decided to save his reputation at the expense of his comfort, and returned to his former position on the floor.

There must have been a weary note in his voice, for when work had been continued for a few moments, the kiddie said doubtfully:

"Pe'haps you would yather not make the ca'iages and the station?"

Dad clutched at the straw and explained that it was impossible at his age to sit long upon the floor without becoming stiff, and the Little Chap, after



thinking it over, inquired if it would be better to "pyay at moving about."

Dad agreed that it would, and the kiddie, whose spirits sprang up like a sudden breeze, blowing all the dark clouds from his face, put forth his alternative :

"Then I know what we'll do. We'll pyay at twains with our little engine, shall we? I will be the dwiver and push the engine along, and you will be the ca'iages and come behind me. And we will go under the table and call it a tunnel. It will be gweat fun; and when we get to the big chair on the hearthrug we will call it a station."

The child was full of glee, but dad, I am sure, groaned inwardly, and would willingly have regarded his easy chair as a terminus from which the train was not timed to depart; but he had been caught in his own mesh and was helpless.

To do him justice he put a good face on it, and his panting as he followed in the wake of the driver afforded his companion much satisfaction because of the touch of realism it lent to the game. "When you bweathe like that," he said cheerfully, "I pwetend it is the engine that says 'puff, puff,' but"—as dad bumped his head for the second time—"if you want to say fings you will have to pwetend to be the gua'd, because ca'iages can't talk."

It was at this point with the train just emerging from the tunnel that mother and I entered, and put an end to dad's physical sufferings.

"Anyhow, you've succeeded in shaking the child up," said mother; "or vice versa."

Dad said nothing, but since then he has seemed to think that the chances of the Little Chap's continued existence on this planet are not so slender after all.

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN WHICH I PASS THROUGH A LONG TUNNEL

**I** SEE that the events last recorded took place on the first Saturday in September. I recall the day and the season with the softened pleasure one associates with a happy experience of long ago. I remember how brown autumn had brushed her first warm tints over the landscape—not very deep or rich, of course, but suggestive of what she meant to do as the days went by.

The lanes above and beyond the Bastion were delightfully attractive that day. Not much traffic passes over them, for they are little more than by-ways, and they are stony and uneven enough to make one's journey something of an adventure at the best of times, but broad strips of green fringe the roadway and refresh the eye, and the air is sweet with the good smell of the moors.

In some places, however, the green carpet is almost concealed by bushes of tangled gorse, high and numerous enough to be called a hedge. When I first saw them on a cloudy day in early July they were black and unlovely, but on this September day the change was magical. It was as though Nature, lavish of her wealth, had tossed handfuls of yellow coin to these dusky tenants of the common ; and I think even Sandy was moved by the rich display.

We passed slowly along between the golden walls until Netherleigh came into sight, far below. It looked shadowy and unsubstantial somehow, more like a painted picture than a real town. We saw it through a thin veil of haze, and in the grey of its buildings there was some hint of colour, as though the mists that enwrapped them had caught the hue of the orchards. The shadows were blue and luminous but ill-defined, and it was not easy to see where town and country met, for the mist thickened beyond the river, and the cloud shadows were strong. I remember how difficult it was to realise that below the mist life was pursuing its usual course; that whilst Nature on the heights was busy with her illusions of brush and palette she was just as busy down below driving the varied machinery to which man yokes her.

That was how long ago? Twelve weeks! for it is now the end of November, and the view from my attic window is very different. Everything is covered with a thick mantle of snow—or almost everything. Clustered trees rear their black masses from the white hillsides, for they have shaken off the pure offering of the skies, as many of us in our dark moods reject the grace of heaven. The sky above is the colour of pearl, but when I move my head a little I see that it deepens into lead, and I know that there will be more snow before long. I cannot distinguish the road that leads to Overburn—it is just part of the general whiteness, but I know where it lies, and I say God pity and help those who may be caught upon those unsheltered heights when darkness falls. Even as I write the snowflakes come—light as a breath; large as a silver crown; thick as a curtain of wool; and the stage on which I have spent so many



happy hours as an interested super is shut from my eyes.

And yet that is not so, for as I lean back in my chair and look into the heart of the fire I can see everything and everybody with wonderful clearness. It is a great gift—this of mental reproduction—and one which I suppose we do not appreciate as we ought, though without it life would be colourless indeed, and robbed of all its most treasured pictures. How often have I traversed those mind galleries during the weary weeks that I have lain upon my back, and with how much of quiet contentment and delight! To-day I am disposed to thank God for the unspeakable gift of Memory.

As I write, the most recent though not perhaps the most beautiful, of these outdoor pictures rises before my eyes. The autumn tints are a little deeper; the browns are flushed with red and amber; there is grey in the purple of the moors, and the bracken is turning yellow. In the neighbourhood of Heatherdyke where the moor runs out like a purple moraine into green pastures which soon become smooth as well-trimmed lawns, the road is lined with brambles, whose well-filled branches tempt the thirsty wayfarer to loiter on his way and take his fill of luscious fruit. Hedge and tree are gay with scarlet berries: and in the banks of white cloud piled upon the horizon the sky seems to have caught in its magic mirror clear-cut reflections of Alp and glacier resting upon an arch of gold. The illusion was strong at the time, and even now it is difficult to believe that the Alps were vapour and the arch which seemed to uphold them just a crest of moor which the sun's rays had burnished.

It was the last day of September and for me the

last day of liberty in this year of grace. There had been no sunnier, richer day in that rich month than this until Overburn was reached, when the sun set and the fine gold turned to dross.

Hyperbole? Yes; put into bald prose it means that when we reached the house the Chesterfields were away for the day, and we had counted on them for more than spiritual refreshment. Sandy and I looked at each other, and Fanny looked at us both, open-mouthed and resourceless. Up to that moment I had been increasingly conscious of a healthy appetite, but that was considerate enough to depart, and I was willing—even eager—to go on my way fasting. Fasting, indeed, seemed to be the fit and religious thing to do under the circumstances; but Sandy was of another opinion.

He continued staring at me with a humorous expression on his honest face, and his eyes twinkled a little as they looked into mine. There was not much twinkle *there*, I am sure.

“We’ll just go back to Mrs. Pegg’s,” he remarked; “she’ll give us a bite o’ some sort, I’ll warrant.”

It was a wise suggestion, I do not doubt, and I could say nothing against it. Mrs. Pegg was at home, and she opened her house, her heart and her larder to us. It would be base ingratitude not to recognise the warmth of her welcome and the prodigal provision she made for our material wants.

Sandy ate methodically, with the steady deliberation of a man who regards eating as a duty, and duty as a privilege; and I forced myself to take something for decency’s sake, albeit I did not succeed in satisfying Mrs. Pegg’s idea of what was fitting.

What the good woman said I do not know, though

I strove hard to conceal my feelings, and I hope with some success. But if the scene is vivid enough, the dialogue is gone from my memory. Some part of me talked and laughed and was amiable, but I myself, I am sorry to realise, was out on a wild-goose chase after the uncatchable. I know that she praised her home-made productions after the manner of the modest Yorkshire housewife, who refuses to tell conventional lies about her baking, or to call the super-excellent anything less than good, "though she says it as shouldn't"; and I know that the decrepit state of my appetite called for deep concern, but I know no more. Ephraim's words made a deeper impression, perhaps because he only came in twice. "I hope you are well, sir," was his greeting when I entered, and when I left he held my hand in his for quite a long time whilst his sad eyes searched mine as if to read the secret of the disappointment that lurked there, and he murmured, "I can say nothing better than 'Mizpah,' sir." In the light of later events it would have been more appropriate if he had substituted that other passage from Genesis which tells you not to fall out by the way.

For in a strictly literal sense it was that which would have happened if Sandy had not been quick enough to catch me as I reeled and fell over to the left. We had reached the outskirts of Netherleigh, and were approaching the bridge at a steady pace, when my head began to swim, and my supports gave way. Sandy had the "A" mixture out in a moment, and I managed to swallow it in the presence of a crowd of gaping youngsters who had just been set free from school; but I have no recollection at all of what followed, until once more I opened my eyes in



my own room and saw mother standing by the bedside and dad with his back to the fire, and felt on my wrist the touch that told me that Irving was sitting near.

I smile now, as I look into the red glow and sleepily watch the fire faces that come and go, but I am conscious of some humiliation too. I ask myself, or else that stupid Man Inside asks me, what caused that heart attack; and I evade the answer, preferring to call myself hard names and to asseverate that I deserve them. Even now, when weeks have passed away and at times I have to struggle against the mummy feeling, I am vexed and go hot all over when I remember that I played the fool that day.

It was a bad affair this time—no baby “gird,” to use Harriet’s favourite phrase. There was no conscious battling with death: no vision of lake or ferryman. No little voice sounded in my ears, nor did I feel any pull such as had been promised me. I lay inert, helpless, and others fought for me; and not least those inner forces which are so loyal to the interests of the kingdom even when the king himself lies stunned and crippled.

When Irving slept I do not know. During those dark endless hours of night he seemed to be always near me, and then I was at rest. I was not afraid when he was absent—I was not aware that there was anything to be afraid of—but when he sat down by my side I was vaguely conscious that I had not been quite at ease; as he may feel who awakes from troubled sleep, and finds about him the light of morning.

So passed day after day, night after night, with nothing to distinguish them but their varying degrees of weariness and pain, of fitful throb and tumult;

and ever during the night—or so it seemed—and often during the day, there sat by my side that calm figure of a man whose brow was unruffled, whose voice was low but firm, in whose eyes the lamp of life burned always steadily—a man sure of himself; as full of resource as of hope, whose vitality overflowed upon him to whom he ministered, revivifying and refreshing him as hidden springs reanimate the earth. God bless Doctor Irving and all such men as he!

Does it seem stupid, I wonder, to write down all this? As I read it over I am half inclined to answer that it does. One surely need not describe the tunnels through which one passes on the journey of life! And yet why should we not tell what experiences befall us there? For most of us find the tunnels as we journey along, and when we cannot climb our mountains we must be willing to go through them, recking nothing of the darkness, and getting what comfort we may from the thought that the tunnel may be a short cut to wider and richer prospects, and that the longest and blackest of them ends—somewhere.

This one of mine is ending, and though as yet I can see nothing clearly from my carriage windows, the light that enters is full of the promise of vision, and I am content. I know that for some time to come I shall be shut up here, but the windows of my soul shall be open, and through them I will look upon life and will live.

When I was just a little way past the worst I had two visitors, and theirs are the only faces, outside those of the household, that I have seen.

Mother brought in the Little Chap one day, and I could see as I looked into his solemn little face that

he had been warned to be silent. Mother held him up so that he might kiss my forehead, and as he slid to his feet again he offered me the best stimulus to recovery that he knew: "Uncle Onry; when you are better I will tell you another sto'y about a twain."

On another occasion, when the padre and Doris had called to make inquiries, the doctor, who happened to be in the house, had given permission for one of them to see me for just a few seconds. I did not know until later how the choice had been determined.

"My dear doctor," said the padre, "I am greatly obliged to you, but I am an old man and the steps are many. I will climb them a little later when your patient is strong enough to listen to my chatter. To-day, Doris will bear lightly the burden of my good wishes."

Irving brought her in, and she came quietly up to the bed and looked down into my eyes. She took my hand and pressed it, as it lay upon the counterpane.

"The doctor says you are on the mend. I'm so glad," she said. "I'm pulling, and so is father—pulling hard and all the time. We shall never let go."

Another pressure, and she was gone.

Was I excited? Not the least bit, I vow. It was good to see her; good to feel that she cared; but my pulse beat no faster, and when she had left I fell into a dreamless sleep.

Then there came a day—was it a fortnight ago, or more?—when Irving went up to the fire and leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece in the old way, and said, more briskly than had been his wont:

"Well, you've disappointed that Stygian friend of yours once more, and now that you have weathered



the storm you may as well go into dry dock for a bit before you start out on new adventures."

My voice felt weak as I tried to send it the length of the room.

"Was the storm on the Styx, then; or are you mixing your drinks, if I may so speak?"

"Don't be captious," he replied. "As my figures of speech don't please you, I'll fall back upon plain prose, and I want you to listen to me. You'll have to take things easy for a good while after this round. Fortunately it is winter, and even if your physical condition were very different you couldn't go out. You are prepared for that, I daresay, but there is more. You must not have much company, and it will be some weeks before you can go downstairs. It looks as if you would have to hibernate for the winter. Now, what do you think of the outlook?"

"I haven't strength enough at present to be even a passive resister," I said. In truth I felt at the moment that I cared for nothing but to be quiet.

"That feeling will pass as you gain strength," he replied, "and I want to prepare you for the change. You will not be as strong as you feel. Are you prepared to be a mummy again?"

At that word my soul rose in rebellion.

"No," I said, with what emphasis I could command. "I have tasted life, and I will live. When I can no longer live I will join my Stygian friend."

I knew by the sound of his voice that he approved.

"You don't regret the experiment, then, in spite of this rather serious result?" he inquired.

"Is it a result or an accident?" I asked in my turn.

"I am afraid it is a result," he said, "perfectly

natural when everything is taken into account. But you needn't be discouraged ; if you can get over this I don't know what you can't get over."

"Then we won't disturb the mummy," I replied. "We'll go on living."

"For the present," he said, "the doses will be once more homœopathic, and strictly according to prescription."

"That must be so, I suppose. But if I can't leave the train I won't go to sleep in the corner, and make life *all* tunnel. I will at least look out of the windows."

## CHAPTER XX

### IN WHICH I BOTH GROWL AND PURR

I HAVE become somewhat disgusted with autobiography lately and am almost tempted to abandon it in favour of some other form of literary work. Irving, in that cynical way of his, suggests that I might try my hand at reviewing books; and though he does not mean it seriously and would be bitterly disappointed, I am sure, if the production of these memoirs were to cease, I am half inclined to act as wet nurse to the idea, which I may ultimately adopt. If only he would write a book I would very gladly review it: it would be congenial work for the savage who still dwells in me. My quarrel with autobiography is that it demands sincerity and such laying bare of the heart as is scarcely decent. It is all very well to talk about "making a clean breast" of things, but you don't put your breast in the window to show every passer-by how clean it is.

Irving laughed when I hurled this argument at him, and there are times when his laugh makes me boil over, and then he laughs more loudly. He might well laugh, as I pointed out to him, seeing that he was the Machiavelian schemer who pushed the pen into my hand, knowing no doubt as an experienced man of the world the maze of difficulties into which it would



lead me. Or to vary the figure, he was the knowing spider who showed the innocent and fascinated fly what a "crowded hour of glorious life" it might enjoy by spinning a web for itself, but omitted to indicate the satisfaction he would himself experience in watching the hapless creature's struggles.

Instead of denying or admitting it like a man he just laughed again and said "Nonsense!" and went on to declare that a doctor has a right to look at one's breast, and then accused me of exaggerating difficulties. It was like those remarkable defences you see in reports of libel actions. In the first place the defendant didn't do it; alternatively, if he did do it he didn't mean anything by it; finally, if he did mean something he was absolutely justified and there is nothing to make a fuss about.

No, autobiography would be right enough if it were merely for the writer's own eyes; if he could pass the time with it as he does with a cigar, and at the end have no more tangible evidence of its existence. Of course, the obvious comment is that he might treat his manuscript as he does his tobacco leaf, but he can't when the bargain was that he was to let his doctor see it. That is where, in my innocence, I made my fatal mistake.

The next obvious course is to tell the truth but not the whole truth, and not nothing but the truth, but the worst of it is I forget all about the doctor when I get my pen in my hand. Besides, that would mean insincerity and the locking up of the heart, which brings me back to where I started.

It was dad, I remember, who affirmed that I had a strain of the donkey in me, inherited from my maternal ancestors, and it may be this that leads me, even as

I write, to determine that my autobiography shall be autobiography undiluted, doctor or no doctor ; and when I can no longer bare my breast biography shall end.

To be frank then, Doris, poor girl, is the cause of all the commotion, and it is a good thing she is not aware of it. Mother, I am sure, is anxious and terribly afraid than I am going to fall in love, and I will express my conviction that Irving is every bit as bad, though there are times when he makes use of innuendo and facial contortions which are calculated to water the plant he wishes to die.

I am sick to death of pointing out that the Notice Board is still intact : that Doris and I understand each other perfectly and are the best of friends and good comrades and may be trusted to lose neither our heads nor our hearts. Such friendships might never have been heard of, yet there are several well-known instances with which these ultra-cautious guardians of mine must be familiar. What did Dante live for if not to prove the possibility of friendships that were too spiritual and exalted to be common ? But I should have thought educated people like mother and the doctor might have been generous and discerning enough to recognise that Doris and I are of the limited number to whom the experience is possible.

Dad, I am glad to acknowledge, is not a party to the conspiracy. My respect for him grows as I get to understand him better, and the worship of common-sense of which he is priest or apostle attracts me strongly. He is the only person who talks sensibly about my relations with Doris and who shares my point of view. If only he would treat the subject with just a little less levity we should hit it off very

well, but even when he speaks sober truth he spoils it with a chuckle.

"Don't you let them bully you, Dick, my boy," he said a day or two ago. "You're old enough to choose your own friends, and if you want 'em in petticoats it's your own affair. She's a rattling good sort, Doris is, and as I said to your mother if you were a marrying man I'd as soon have her for a daughter-in-law as here and there one. Of course, that's out o' the question, and if you were to try that game on she wouldn't have you. Good heavens! the girl's plenty o' common-sense; but there's no law against your being friends, and if you take my tip you won't let 'em make one."

Unfortunately mother and Irving are in league and they keep the key of the prison; and even yet, though Christmas is drawing near, visitors are forbidden.

There is, however, as I have remarked before, a penny post, and it is surprising how much satisfaction the modest expenditure of a penny can ensure—even Harriet knows that.

"Ther's no letter for you, Miss Trichud," she remarked only this morning when she brought up my breakfast. I was not expecting one, but it was not policy to inform her that I had only one correspondent—or at most two—so I suggested that the postman might be late.

She shook her head. "Nay, 'e's been, cos 'e gave me some of 'is impidence, did t' saucebox. If 'Melia 'adn't been there 'e'd 'ave 'eard my tongue."

"He had a letter for you?" I hazarded.

She reddened a little as she made the admission. "'E writes pretty oft, does Pimple," she said, as she turned away.



I returned to the subject when she came up to put the room straight.

"Does Pimple say when he will be home again?" I inquired.

"'E'll be back afore Christmas. 'E says 'e's stalled o' bein' away."

"And you are 'stalled' too, I suppose? You'll be glad to have him back, Harriet?"

"It'll be right enough," she replied, bending her head lower and dusting vigorously. "Not that it makes any diff'rence to me one way or t' other. All t' same I don't see why I should like t' puddin' in t' pan better nor on my plate. 'Appen if 'e were to stay away a long time I should miss 'im a bit, unless I were to get past it same as you do when you miss a meal. But I've no patience wi' some folk."

Harriet has not many acquaintances, and when she adopts the particular tone of voice in which she now spoke I am generally right in concluding that the reference is to Simpson or her young man.

"What's the matter with some folk?" I asked.

"Why look at 'Melia. If 'er young man goes on a day-trip to Blackpool wi' t' Choir she's suspicionin' 'at 'e's larkin' about wi' some other girl, an' she's like a cat i' pattens while 'e comes back. An' t' fuss she makes of 'im if 'e's been away a week is enough to turn t' milk."

I smiled. "Perhaps her young man likes these tokens of affection. I suppose Simpson is more demonstrative by nature than you."

Harriet's face said more than her tongue, and said it more eloquently. "P'rhaps she is; anyway she's a lot softer over men. But if I couldn't 'ave a young man 'at I could trust without followin' 'im all up an'

down, an' sittin' on t' doorstep while 'e comes out, I'd go without, same as plenty better nor me has to do."

We let it rest there. So far as I am concerned absence certainly does not make my heart less fond of Doris, and Harriet is discerning enough to know how eagerly I anticipate the postman's visit. The padre does not write often, and a postscript is as much as I ever expect, but Doris gives me all the news of their circle and illuminates it with flashes of wit and humour that make her communications anything but dead letters. They run to many sheets at times, so that the padre has even hinted at the possibility of a stationery famine at Overburn, but they are of far more importance to me than any of Irving's concoctions and they form a solid barrier between me and the ferryman. They are as the sign of the Cross to the Prince of Darkness—I have but to brandish one in my hand and both ferry and ferryman disappear!

And yet what are they all about? The daily life of a simple community: the gossip of a couple of moorland villages. I have books upon my shelves that are ready to tell me a thousand things more important than these—books that I have read and enjoyed, yawned and fallen asleep over many a time. How is it that the records of happenings that the world will never hear of stir my blood and whet my appetite?

"I must try to amuse you when you are shut up in the train," she wrote, "yet what does Overburn offer in the way of news?" What indeed! I think just now of a certain sensitive clergyman who used to visit me, and I wonder what he would think if he could read these Memoirs. I see the look of puzzled

weariness deepen on his delicate face as he tries to understand what interest the Dick Dallinger of his acquaintance can possibly take in such vulgar people and commonplace incidents. Pompilia and Caponsacchi—there are characters and there is a situation worthy of the interest we used to display as we discussed the niceties of the problem ; but that anyone should think it necessary to tell me, and that I should be pleased to know, that Fanny had a marvellous remedy for chilblains : that she had been promoted to one of Doris's long frocks and had put her hair up—there is for that no other comment than a groan. Well, well, my friend, I can only urge in explanation that Pompilia and Caponsacchi are dead to this world, and united, we may hope, in a happier ; whereas I am at present very much alive and desirous of remaining so ; and those whom Doris describes, if only ordinary dogs, are at any rate living and therefore of much more importance to me than any extraordinary lions that are dead and buried. I do not deny that honey has been found in dead lions, but I am seeking it in hives of a less sensational kind, and I fail to see why it should be less sweet and nutritious.

So when Doris describes the Study Circle and outlines the debate, I sit once more in the padre's kitchen and lean forward with every sense alert. When she tells me of her visit to Mrs. Thorn I also stand at the bedside and alternately laugh and frown as the one-sided conversation proceeds. A month of Mrs. Thorn would "natter" poor Hannibal into the asylum. I thought the old lady would ere this have left a world that has proved so blind to her virtues, but she lingers on ; though Doris felt sure the end was near the other day when she found herself addressed as "love,"



and had the illusion dispelled only when she found that Jane was by no means similarly favoured.

How Doris manages to kiss her on leaving I do *not* understand, though I have been awake long enough now to note the discriminating distinctions women make in the distribution of their kisses, and I admire the skill with which it is done, although I cannot determine whether it ought to be classed as a fine art or an exact science.

Above all it does me good to know that Doris is always "pulling," and I have quite persuaded myself that I feel the pull. She is worrying just now about the padre. His "breathing apparatus," as he terms it, is giving him trouble, but he never complains. I cannot wonder that Doris is so sweet and fresh when she has a father who turns every dark cloud round so that you may see the silver lining. When he wheezes he asserts that it is merely his tubes that are becoming musical like Pan's pipes, and says he makes melody in his heart when he cannot with his lips. "It is all right" is one of his favourite expressions, even when to the ordinary eye and ear it is obviously all wrong. He promises to come to see me before long when the involuntary music shall have died away, and hopes to climb my stairs "like a boy of ten" and greet me "with a full voice." I shall be glad to see him, for he, too, does me more good than my doctor. And if Doris comes with him so much the better. She is, I repeat, of more value than any medicine; in fact I am not sure that Irving ought not to revise his prescription in this sense—for "A" mixture read "Doris."

## CHAPTER XXI

### IN WHICH I SPEND AN UNEXCITING CHRISTMAS DAY

CHRISTMAS DAY passed quietly. I was allowed down to dinner and warned against excitement and over-eating, and had no difficulty in avoiding both. My appetite was still on crutches ; and the fare, which was of the conventional Christmas type, did not prove enticing. The day was dull and anything but Christmaslike. After dinner dad went off to sleep, and slept soundly but noisily until tea was brought in ; and mother, after making most valiant attempts to keep awake and entertain me, was also conquered by drowsiness in the end, though she roused herself at intervals to assure me with a yawn that she knew it was too bad of her but she really couldn't help it.

I was thus left to myself, and it might be thought that I was at any rate no worse off than on most other days, and in a sense that is true.

But solitude in my own den is not loneliness, for I know where to look for company there. The pictures upon the walls are of my own choosing, and they are all friendly and smile down at me with sympathetic familiarity. My chairs—old things at which a broker would look askance—are delightfully easy, having accommodated themselves in the course of years to my peculiar angularities. The iron fender, scratched

and worn, is made for use, and simply shouts for me to put my feet on it and be comfortable ; and the window beckons me time and time again to look out upon the prospect of vale and moor and sky, which is an entertainment in itself.

The drawing-room, on the other hand, depresses me, though mother denies that there is anything stiff and formal about it. She looks at it, however, with other eyes. The pictures are valuable, and have the air of knowing it and of holding themselves aloof ; the chairs are no doubt easy in their way, but it is a very correct and proper way which makes you feel you are only a stranger and sojourner and not expected to be easy too long. The fender—well, no man in his senses would dream of putting even his slippered feet upon anything so elaborate ; and as to the view from the window, it just isn't a view. There are a few leafless trees which block out such landscape as would otherwise be visible from this altitude, and which with derisive irony permit a breach wide enough to afford a sight of the gasworks. There is the conservatory, it is true, which looks green and pleasant, but at the same time cold and circumscribed and artificial.

The most natural thing, I suppose, would have been to sleep myself, but I never in my life felt more wakeful. There were piles of Christmas numbers scattered about, most of which I had already seen, and I was not inclined to look at the rest. I therefore drew my chair a little nearer to the fire and set to work to collect and scrutinise my thoughts. I was soon so absorbed that I regretted mother's well-meant and spasmodic interruptions.

I had now been living seven months—with what result ? The first answer I tried was discouraging,



but the more I thought about it the more satisfied I became. I had done nothing, it is true. I could not say with conviction that a single life had been made fuller or happier by anything I had done. There was the Little Chap who was certainly very fond of me, but he would have been happy enough in any case.

I had lent Pimple books, which he could have got from any Free Library, and he had made his own selection with very little assistance from me. I had hoped to help him, but so far I had not done much.

Then there was Harriet, and I was bound to admit that she had shown many signs of satisfaction at the increased interest I had taken in her, but I could hardly flatter myself that she was one whit the better for it, or hope that I had exercised any real influence on her life.

The Man Inside suggested Doris, but I put her aside for the time being. She bulked much too largely to be included in a general survey. She would have got in front and shut out all the rest, so I shut her out myself with heroic self-control.

No, from the point of view of direct influence my experiment in living had been productive of nothing at all so far as I could judge, and I had to turn to the other side of the shield before I got any comfort.

After all; I was only seven months old in this new world, and at that age it would be precociously egotistical to expect to exercise any measurable influence upon my fellows. I ought, however, to have grown during that period; life for me ought to have become richer, more intense. Had I been receptive and learned the lessons the larger life had for me? I had bound myself apprentice; had I made progress: found out what was to be done in the workshop;

what tools were there and for what purpose ; and what part of the work I—weak of body at the best—had been fashioned by nature to undertake ? I asked the question honestly, and I answered with equal honesty that I had not entirely failed.

The people I had got to know were all ordinary people, and most of them of the humbler ranks of life, but I asked for nothing better. Each of them had taught me something : each was capable of teaching me more : each had helped me to understand the great problems that life presents ; and as I thought about them, one by one, I knew that it was not merely because of Doris that I wanted to live—it was because I felt myself now to be a part of the throbbing humanity about me ; bone of its bone, flesh of its flesh.

In the thrilling drama of human life I realised that there must be a part for me to play. It might be an insignificant one, but it was one that I could play better than any other ; and I determined to keep my eyes upon the stage and to listen attentively as I stood in the wings, unknown and out of sight, so that when my cue should come I might recognise it and step forward and act my part at least intelligently. In the meantime, I said, is not the audience essential to the play ? Let it be mine to cheer the hero and hiss the villain, and to do both with understanding.

It was about seven o'clock when the sound of wheels on the drive made dad drop his pipe and start to his feet.

" God bless my life," he ejaculated ; " I'd forgotten all about 'em. Do you know, my dear, I met young Terry down the road yesterday, and he told me that he'd squared matters with Miss Janet, and I asked him to bring her up this evening. Said you'd be dying

to see her and all that sort o' thing. Hanged if I ever gave it another thought, and I'll bet they're here."

Mother had also risen, and astonishment stifled any feeling of annoyance; stifled and buried it, for with mother no unkindly sensation has any chance of life in the atmosphere of orange-blossom.

"Whatever do you mean, Richard? Be quick. Are they engaged?"

"Nothing less, my dear. Don't look at me like that; *I* didn't do it. 'No fools like old fools,' you know. By Jove, it's a lucky good job I heard the cab."

There was no time for more before the presumably happy couple were upon us. Mother received them as if she had been looking forward to that moment all the day—in fact I am not sure that her words, strictly interpreted, would not have borne that construction; and dad aided and abetted the deception.

"Well, Francis, my boy," he said when the preliminaries were over and we were all seated round the fire. "I broke the news to 'em all right and they took it fairly well when you consider how sudden it was. Dick said nothing—took his breath, I reckon—but he stood the shock and that's something. You might have had a rival there, you know, if you hadn't been in the field a bit too soon. He's a beggar for the ladies, Dick is, Miss Janet. It's taking his mother and me all our time to hold him in."

Miss Janet very properly refused to accept this as anything more than pleasant paternal chaff. She hopped as usual from twig to twig as she replied:

"Oh, Mr. Dallinger—but really, Edith, your husband has such a sense of humour. I have said to Mr.—to Mr.—I mean to Francis" (here she blushed very becomingly) "very often, have I not, Francis? that



Mr. Dallinger is the soul of wit. I do not know that I ever met anybody unless it was Tom Hood—and of course I never met him, but I mean—of course you understand what I mean ; and I don't at all mind you laughing at me, Mr. Richard."

I hastened to protest, and with such emphasis that Miss Janet got off the track completely.

"I didn't mean, of course, that you were really laughing at me, not outwardly, because you would be much too considerate, but a great many people, I know, must laugh at me inwardly. You see, dear," (this to mother, not me) "I am always making slips, and getting into hot water——"

"Sh!" said her lover warningly. "Keep off the hot water subject, my dear."

I looked at Mr. Francis curiously. He was a big florid man who, if he really were fifty, seemed to accept the fact with equanimity and was content to look his age. He was bald and for the most part clean-shaven, the exception being that he had what the irreverent call, I understand, "sideboards"—tufts of whisker, in his case of a pepper and salt appearance—that adorned each cheek in irregular triangles. The lines about his face spoke of an easy temper and of good humour, and were silent as to anything strong or otherwise attractive about him. I remembered that dad had ventured the opinion that Miss Janet must have a funny taste in husbands, but then what about the husband's taste? Why worry? Are not marriages made in heaven?

He seemed happy enough at all events, and had his legs stretched out upon the hearth, and his hands clasped behind his head as though he had been the most intimate of friends ; and he puffed away at his cigar with none of the airs of the bashful lover.

When he made the remark about the hot water he gave as good a chuckle as he could manage without risk to the cigar.

"Oh—you—unkind—man," said Miss Janet, so slowly as to suggest that an unexpected blow had taken away her breath; "now I call that really too bad, Edith. I would not have told you for worlds and Francis had no need to think that I should. It was too foolish for anything, and it would make me the laughing-stock of the town if it were to get out. But you men are all alike, Mr. Dallinger; you must have your joke at the expense of us poor women. Not that I mean you are all alike really, because, of course, there is a great difference in men. But you won't misunderstand me."

"What's it all about?" inquired dad. "I'm on your side, anyway, Miss Janet, choose what it is."

"You see, dear," said Miss Janet, looking at dad by mistake and then correcting herself hurriedly. "You see, Edith, if Francis hadn't mentioned it no one would have known. But they can say what they like about the long tongues of women, I really do think, don't you, dear? that the gentlemen can *not* keep a secret, and it's just to cover themselves that they lay the blame on us. I am sure Mr.—eh—Francis must have told everybody about our engagement."

"You will admit you told me, Francis," said dad reprovingly.

"You never said it was to be a secret," said the impenitent culprit, half turning his head towards his fiancée. "What is there to keep quiet about? I ain't ashamed of it. But I've never told a soul about the hot water."

"Francis!" the little lady almost screamed.

"You've done it again. I don't think I could ever forgive you if you were to tell."

"I'm surprised at you, Francis," dad again put in; "and you only just engaged, too. If there's anything to be told let Miss Janet tell it herself. You'll learn after a bit that silence is golden, my boy."

Mr. Francis's eyes were half closed. "Wild horses wouldn't drag it out of me," he said.

"I didn't really mean to be severe, Mr. Dallinger," said Miss Janet, "and of course Francis would not be unkind, but I *couldn't* tell you about it, Edith, dear, I simply couldn't."

"Don't say anything further about it, dear," said mother; "Richard would draw you on, but you need take no notice of him. We will talk about something else."

That was all very well, but the incident, whatever it was, had a sort of cobra-like fascination for Miss Janet.

"Thank you, dear," she said. "Indeed it isn't a fit subject for a lady's drawing-room. The vinegar was bad enough—worse than an aquarium as I said to Francis at the time—but the cheese was terrible. It was, it was——"

"A *menagerie*," suggested Mr. Francis.

"Francis, you'll be telling yet," said Miss Janet with pathetic resignation; "and if it goes on much longer I shan't much mind if you do. You see, Mr. Richard, I felt I should have to do it or die."

"It must have been a wretched feeling," I said politely. "I think I have felt that way."

"Oh, have you, do you think?" inquired the little lady; "and was it with a microscope? You know when I saw just the weeniest weeny bit of cheese in the world, Edith—ever such a small piece—when I saw it I screamed and nearly fainted."



"You've let it out now," said her lover. "You'd better tell them the whole story."

"Do you think so?" she replied. "Would it really not matter among friends? Well, I am sure I can trust you never, NEVER to mention it to anybody else; but after I had seen those horrible, horrible things under the microscope, Edith——"

"A bit of as nice ripe Stilton, Dallinger, as you ever saw," explained Mr. Francis in an undertone.

"I felt I must do something, for I thought of what I had just eaten; and it occurred to me that if I could drink some very, very hot water, as nearly boiling as possible—because you see, dear, I had not had very much cheese—I thought it might perhaps—I am sure, Mr. Dallinger, you will understand."

"But you don't mean to say you really tried to drink boiling water, Janet!" said mother in a tone of horror.

"Well, you see, dear, I simply daren't go to bed with things like that—you know—perhaps still alive; and I thought if I drank it quickly I shouldn't mind the pain, but——"

"It was her screams took me into the kitchen," said Mr. Francis. "She didn't get much down, I can tell you, but it's a mercy she didn't end herself as well as the menagerie."

"Whatever did you do?" inquired mother.

"Oh, Francis is very good in an emergency. He made me swallow some olive oil, and it eased me after a time, especially when he told me that oil was fatal to those things."

Dad had some sort of a seizure at that moment, and mother hastily proposed bridge; whereupon I retired to my own room.

## CHAPTER XXII

### IN WHICH NETHERLEIGH BECOMES EXCITED

THE episode of Miss Janet's engagement had proved mildly exciting, but an event that occurred two days later relegated it to the position of a "back number" much more quickly than would have been the case otherwise.

Here in Netherleigh we don't mind showing and admitting our feelings: we can't help being old-fashioned and provincial, as the curate I have already referred to once styled us, I remember. He was a very delicate, rosemary kind of man, sweet and affable, who might have been distilled, I should say, into an exquisite scent, but who was altogether too high-souled and refined for a neighbourhood like ours, and he returned after a few months of torture to his native city. He was a nice man and could intone beautifully, but he was thrown away on us, and I hope London appreciates him as much as he appreciates London.

I see the look on his face now as he gave vent to his feelings one afternoon many years ago. It was not disgust I saw there—he was too kindly for that—but the sort of forbearing pity a musical missionary might manifest when listening to the performance of a Dahomian orchestra. "Why," he said, "the people will stand about in groups for an hour at a time turning over an incident of the most trivial importance."

I rather sympathised with him at the time, but now that I am one of the people I should argue against him.

I thought of his words when dad came in to tea on the Saturday and told us what had happened. It was the day after Boxing Day, and the streets in the neighbourhood of the Market Place had been unusually crowded in the afternoon, when purchasers and holiday-makers had made the most of an interval of fine weather.

Dad was on his way home like many others, and had reached the corner of the Airlee Road when he heard exciting shouts behind him, and looking round saw men, women and children running to the doorways and passages on each side of the street and leaving the roadway clear for a pony which was tearing madly down the centre. Dad's build and disposition do not fit him for deeds of athletic daring and he stepped inside a gate at the angle of the two roads with a sensation underneath his waistcoat that might have been inherited from his son.

It was a question which road the pony would take. As it came nearer dad saw that two broken shafts were attached to it and that these, beating against the animal's flanks and legs as it dashed along made it frantic with fright. If it should continue up the steep highway past our house all might be well, for there were few people there, and the pony's hot pace could hardly be maintained; but if it should turn in the direction of Airlee an accident seemed inevitable, for the road was crowded, as dad saw, with women and children who were quite ignorant of the danger that threatened them.

Dad tried to shout, but his voice failed him. His excited movements, however, attracted the notice



of Hannibal Wood who was standing at the door of his shop across the way and who took in the situation at a glance as the pony, terrified more and more, no doubt, by the cries of the crowd that followed, selected the path of least resistance, and turned into the Airlee Road.

Hannibal gave a shout that ought to have paralysed any pony but one that had lost its head and so might naturally be considered to have lost its hearing, and leapt with outstretched arms into its very track. It was an heroic act for it was not unpremeditated, but it did not stop the animal though it checked it a very little and caused it to swerve a trifle to the right. That deflection, slight as it was, may have saved the life of some one of the women or children who scattered to the footpaths and escaped with nothing worse than a fright.

The pony continued its headlong course, and was followed by a number of men and youths until pursuit seemed to be hopeless, but the greater part of the crowd gathered about the hapless cobbler who lay, pale and unconscious, in the middle of the road.

Dad assumed control at this point. He despatched a boy on a bicycle for a doctor ; made the crowd stand back, and poured a little brandy, which was readily forthcoming, between the man's lips. There was no outward sign of injury and nobody knew exactly what had happened.

He was carried into his own house and put to bed, and the doctor pronounced him to be suffering from concussion of the brain, if nothing worse. From a nasty bruise above the heart it appeared likely that one shaft had caught him with some force and knocked him violently to the ground.

“ And who is looking after him ? ” mother inquired.

“ Well,” replied dad ; “ that man of his, Grimshaw or whatever they call him, didn’t seem very likely, so I made myself responsible for a nurse ; and till the doctor finds her, two or three women are standing round, groaning a bit, and telling one another how it all happened.”

When Simpson came in a few hours later further particulars were available. The town was full of the double accident, and knots of people were still to be found in every street, “ turning it over,” as my clerical friend would have said. The pony had taken fright and run away as it descended the hill a mile beyond the bridge, at which point it had disengaged itself of the governess-cart to which it had been attached. According to the most reliable report—or perhaps I should say the least unreliable—the occupants had escaped without injury, though Simpson’s young man favoured the more sensational rumour that they had been thrown into the Wharfe, and that their bodies would be found farther down the river.

There was more certainty in regard to the fate of the pony, for there was what appeared to be indisputable evidence that a motor-car had turned and chased it and that it had been brought into Netherleigh, and given into the custody of the police. Some two hundred witnesses of all sizes and conditions could attest the veracity of the latter part of this statement at any rate.

Now I readily admit that if anything of the kind had occurred in Oxford Street the crowds that remained to discuss the event a couple of hours afterwards would probably not have been large enough to annoy the police, and *The Times* would not have felt it

necessary to refer to the event in leaded type. Let us console ourselves by assuming that in Netherleigh we are a little nearer to the heart of nature : that in so small a community man can afford to regard his fellow-man as a brother in whose concerns it is meet, right, and his bounden duty to interest himself.

It required no effort for me to interest myself in Hannibal Wood, but I am bound to say that my sympathy was divided between him and his nurse. I suppose my imagination is as quick as the average man's, and when I got to bed and had nothing to hinder me from giving it rein, I enjoyed what I saw so much that I was quite ashamed of myself when I sobered down a little.

I can only plead in excuse that fancy staged the scene so realistically that I forgot it was fancy. I saw Hannibal regain consciousness to find himself in the power of a member of the sex that frightens him. I pictured a self-controlled woman with a firm mouth and square jaw bending over him, and asserting her authority in a way that made his active eye shoot silent appeals for help. When I fell asleep I found myself in his bedroom, and before I had been there long he was tugging at my coat and beseeching me in the most ludicrous way to save him because she nattered so, but the nurse looked so threatening that I was compelled to refuse.

Poor Hannibal ! Things appeared quite different in the morning, and not at all funny, and I was relieved to hear during the day that he was going on nicely, and that complications were not expected.



## CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH LIEUTENANT STAFFORD ARRIVES AND MRS.  
PEGG PAYS ME A VISIT

“ ‘S come, Miss Trichud,” said Harriet one morning early in the New Year. The girl’s face spoke of excited interest, and I naturally concluded that she referred to Pimple, whose return had been often heralded, and as often delayed.

“ You’ll be glad to have him back,” I said, marvelling a little at this unusual display of emotion.

“ I don’t mean ’im,” she said, in a tone of voice that was not quite complimentary to her lover ; “ I mean Master Norman’s father. I saw ’im a bit since when I was stood at t’ back wi’ t’ milkman. He had Master Norman on ’is shoulder, and ee ! ’e does look nice, ’e’s that tall, an’ with a face same as it ’ad been done wi’ brown polish.”

I was rather keen on seeing the man myself, and my curiosity was gratified sooner than I had expected, for shortly before noon the Little Chap burst into the room and exclaimed :

“ Uncle Onry, my daddy’s come home, and I’ve bwright him to see you because I told him about you ; and, Uncle Onry, do you know that the twains in Egypt——”

I was not to learn anything about the peculiarities of Egyptian trains, however, for the father appeared

at that moment, uttering laughing apologies for his unceremonious visit.

"I don't know what mother will say, you young scamp," he continued, "when she learns the trick you have played me, and knows that we entered the house without leave, and invaded Uncle Onry's sanctum unannounced."

The Little Chap's eyes sparkled. "It was gweat fun to come in like that, wasn't it?" he said. "And we caught Uncle Onry napping, didn't we, daddy?"

"I think you caught your daddy napping," he replied. Then turning to me he said: "I find you've got to be careful what you let the little fellow hear. I used that phrase on the way up and it took his fancy, but you notice I let him come on ahead to give you warning."

A more engaging companion could not be desired. He called me "Uncle Onry" from the first, and there was no ice to be broken. The kiddie took him round the room and exhibited my treasures; he led him to the window, and showed him the tree which was inseparably connected in his mind with the towel adventure; and he gave him a highly-coloured and imaginative account of my last illness. "But after I came to see him," he said, standing between his father's knees, and speaking with great solemnity, "he began to get better, because eve'y night when I said my pya'ers I said: 'And please make Uncle Onry quite well again as soon as you can, because he tells me such nice sto'ies about twains.'"

The "because" was suggestive; but if one must not look a gift horse in the mouth, neither must one examine too closely the motives that led the Little

Chap to lend his weight to the great pull. He *did* pull, for which I am grateful.

They did not stop long, but thereafter Lieutenant Stafford was often in the house. Mother lost her heart to him at first sight, and gave him the freedom of the premises without hesitation. We all liked him, for his good humour never failed, and he had a pleasant nod and greeting for the maids, and an apparently inexhaustible fund of good stories for the rest of us.

He would come bounding upstairs, three at a time, just sobering a little as he entered my room, out of respect for my eccentric heart, and ejaculate: "I say, have you heard——?" or "Did I ever tell you——?" and after the narration bound down again, and repeat the story to mother or dad.

Dad, by the way, gave him Field-Marshal's rank in his estimation from the start, and decorated him with more compliments than any one individual of our frail humanity could be allowed to have earned.

As to Mrs. Stafford—well, she simply wasn't the same woman. All her nervousness and self-consciousness vanished, and she revelled and rejoiced in her husband, and was conceitedly proud of him, as I ventured to tell her. She admitted it without a blush, and asked why she shouldn't be; to which, of course, there was no answer.

The young giant was not all joke and laughter, however. He would sit for an hour sometimes, when his wife was content to spare him so long, and talk, as the padre would say, about the things that matter. He was eager to succeed in his profession, and only regretted that it just now exiled him so much from his wife and child.

"Keep an eye on the kid, old chap," he said one



day. "I want him to grow up straight, and it'll be a sort of comfort to know that you're here to look after him and his mother."

He always came back to that, and wherever the conversation might lead—whether to the desert of Egypt or the moors round Overburn (because, of course, he soon learned all about Doris) it inevitably came back to the Little Chap and his mother. A more perfect bond of affection and understanding, free from anything approaching sentimentality, I am unable to conceive. He was only here six weeks, and during that time my autobiography made no progress.

New experiences, however, came thick and fast, as my strength increased. With the New Year I made a rapid advance—in fact, before the end of January I felt as well as I had ever done. Irving was cautious, but he had to admit that I was something of a marvel. We had a succession of bright, crisp days, and they brought exhilaration with them as I opened my window and drank in the air and the view.

On one memorable occasion Mrs. Pegg arrived on a visit to her daughter, and mother came up to inquire if I was willing to be "at home" to her for a short time. I acquiesced readily enough—anything or anybody from Overburn is as iron to my blood—and she came heavily up and sat down on an ottoman, after glancing dubiously at the easy chair that was offered her.

"I might get in," she said in explanation of her refusal, "but whether I should ever get out again can't be telled without tryin'; an' I should shame to 'ave to be sawn out, let alone t' damage to t' chair."

She did not get through this without a good many

pauses for breath, and I expressed the fear that the steps had been nearly too much for her.

“Not they, marry,” she assured me; “just bide wi’ me a bit, an’ I shall be as right as a trivet. I’m same as a pair o’ bellowses—I blow i’ puffs, but I keep on blowin’, an’ that’s t’ main thing.”

To gain time for her, mother explained that it was Harriet’s birthday, and that Mrs. Pegg had brought her daughter an iced cake of her own baking in honour of the occasion, and had given her a hint of unusual breadth that the consumption of the cake was to be distributed over the entire household.

Mrs. Pegg gave me a knowing look.

“It wasn’t an ’int,” she said, “beggin’ yer pardon, ma’am, for what seems like conteradictin’ ye. I says to ’er right out: ‘An’ I’ve baked it big enough for ’em all to ’ave a taste’; for if there’s owt I can’t abide it’s greediness, an’ girls is thowtless at ’er age. I don’t believe much i’ ’ints, myself—nods an’ winks makin’ up, like, for what ye don’t say—I outs with it, choose who’s there, an’ then they know what I mean. I never was one to laik at blind-man’s buff wi’ my words.”

Conversation had proceeded no further when mother was summoned downstairs to see a visitor of her own, but though Mrs. Pegg then proposed to leave me, she yielded readily enough when I pressed her to remain. I remembered that there was an old-fashioned easy chair of ample dimensions in the spare room across the landing, but she protested that the ottoman was quite comfortable, though she consented to draw it nearer to the fire, where she could contrive to support her back to some extent against the wall, and to use the fender as a footstool.

I asked about Ephraim.

"That neighbour o' mine?" she suggested, whilst ripples and wavelets again spread over her cheeks. "Ee, Mester Richard, but it's tickled me, 'as that, many a time sin' that day." Then her face saddened as she continued:

"But I tell ye now who is a reightdown good neighbour to 'im, an' that's Mester Chestyfield. See ye, I couldn't ha' come to-day but for 'im. You know 'is way, don't ye, an' 'e says i' that grand style of 'is, 'e says: 'Ephra'm will come an' 'ave 'is tea wi' us, an' we'll 'ave a famous talk,' 'e says, 'wi' you out o' t' way.' An' 'e made me feel afore 'e'd finished 'at 'e'd be fair disappointed if I didn't let 'im. Ee, I love that man, Mester Richard."

"Then do you never leave Ephraim?" I inquired.

"Not now; not for long, anyway. 'E gets wahr an' wahr, does Ephra'm, poor lad, an' I'm beginnin' to wonder what 'e's goin' to mak' out. Ther's odd times when I get into t' dolderums, as you mud say, for it's only cats an' such like 'at can see the'r way i' t' dark; but I don't stop in 'em long; I've more sense."

"You still keep smiling?" I suggested.

"Most days; an' pushin' on a step at a time. I'm not religious i' t' same way as Ephra'm; an' for a bit at after we were wed it bothered me, for 'e tried 'is best to fettle me up, like, but I wor same as I couldn't tak' it. We didn't lewk at things i' t' same light, but I couldn't answer 'im out o' t' Bible, so we just 'ad to go wer own ways."

"It must often have been very trying," I remarked, "for I think you told me he has always looked on the dark side of things."



"Allus ; but never as bad as now. I'stead o' bein' dark it's as black as t' fire back. Ther's no light nowhere, now ther' isn't. But you know, Mester Richard, a woman wi' ony sense, she'll reckon things up afore she's been wed long, an' that's what I did. When our 'Arriet come I says to myself one night when she were laid i' t' creddle, an' Ephra'm 'ad been partic'lar low-sperited, I says, 'Easter, lass, ye've got to plan yer life out a bit for t' sake o' t' little 'un. Ye've got a good 'usband, but 'e's same as mournin' paper—black-edged all round—an' if you try to match 'im ye'll be as cheerful as a pair o' framed fewneral cards when t' little lass starts o' takin' a bit o' notice, an' that'll never do.' So, thinks I, I'll go my own way."

"You determined to 'put a cheerful courage on'?"

"I'll tell ye exactly what I did. I said: 'Now ye've got yer life to live, an' if ye can't 'ave everythin' as ye like it ye can do yer best to like everythin' as ye 'ave it. If ye can nobbut keep content,' I says to myself, 't' little lass 'll be like to grow up content an' all, an' we shall manage nicely.'"

"Yes," I commented, "it's easy to make a good resolution, and difficult to keep it."

Mrs. Pegg fidgetted a little, and I wondered if I had touched a sore spot by accident, but that was not so.

"Ther's allus one way," she said at length with some confusion; "an' some'ow I never like to say mich about it. Ye see we get so much Scriptur' at our 'ouse 'at we, like, leave it mostly to Ephra'm. An' I 'ope ye won't think, Mester Richard, 'at I'm better nor onybody else, or 'at I reckon to know my Bible same as 'e does, 'cos I don't an' never shall. But ther's bits I've allus trusted to, an' they've worked

well. It's same wi' religion as wi' makin' cakes an' puddin's—when ye know what turns out right ye've no 'casion to worry: ye just follow t' same plan t' next time wi' a' easy mind."

She hesitated a moment before she continued:

"It says somewhere 'at ye've to cast yer care on 'Im an' 'E'll see ye through all reight. I couldn't give ye t' words to save my life, but that's t' plan I've gone on, an' it's kept me smilin', as I say. When ye've practised for twenty year it's second nature, Mester Richard. Ephra'm's summat cruel just now for bein' mis'erable. He says t' Assyrians is comin', an' locusts, an' I known't what else. It's 'orrible to 'ear 'im, an' some says they'd 'ave 'im ta'en away. But they'll none tak' 'im away, poor lad, while Easter lives—they won't that. I only 'ope it'll please the Lord to call 'im t' first, all t' same."

Harriet interrupted the conversation by bringing my tea, which included a liberal portion of birthday cake; and Mrs. Pegg accompanied her daughter downstairs to play her part in the festive proceedings in the kitchen.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### IN WHICH TOM BIRD VISITS ME AND I RECEIVE A SHAKING

**I**N spite of its many dull and cheerless days, February is to me a delightful month. This year, for instance, we have had so much rain that the dykes must certainly have had their fill and the skies have more often than not been grey and lowering. But now and again there have been great bursts of sunshine and patches of glorious blue, when strong shadows stole forth and stretched themselves upon the grass to disappear at once when the clouds rolled up, like truant schoolboys who snatch with fearful joy a perilous holiday.

It is spring that is in the air, and I feel the thrill of its approach. The mists lie low in the valley, and they are luminous once more, and not without colour. Beneath the soddened soil life is busy now, and there is a stirring of the earth and fallen leaves as the fresh young shoots strive to get a glimpse of the big world they are to serve. The birds have come and are coming, and I have already called a hearty welcome to blackbird, lark and chaffinch, who piped out their greetings as they arrived. As I write, the musical note of the great tit reaches me—clear and deep-toned as a bell. Yellow-hammers, fine birds with fine feathers, are making love on every



tree in the garden, and one of them made its appeal for "a little bit of bread and—no cheese" from my window-sill before I was up this morning.

It is spring, spring who lies sleeping in the arms of February; sleeping, but smiling in her sleep, and sleeping so lightly that if the sun should but kiss her a little more warmly she would awaken at once and leap to the earth which it is her gracious task to deck with beauty.

There is another point of view, of course. It is all very well for me, as dad remarks, to sit up aloft and become sentimental over what I see and foresee; but if I were trudging along heavy roads in a miserable drizzle, with my boots and trousers plastered and bespattered with mud, I might have another tale to tell. I am not sure of that, however, for I have found a knight of the road, as I shall have occasion to relate, who carried more of the joy of spring in his heart than I did, and more mud upon his boots than dad.

But first let me set down a novel experience that came to me this month. I had been working really hard myself, courting success with little hope of succeeding, when all at once I awoke to find myself—not famous exactly, but with my foot upon the ladder of fame.

It was part of my new scheme that I should make a serious attempt to put what knowledge the opportunities of my restricted life had given me to some use. I was not, nor am I yet, so swollen in head as to consider myself a man of genius, but I wondered if any essays and reflections of mine might be of sufficient interest to induce some editor to print them.

There was only one way of finding out and that was by making an attempt, and this I did, committing

my effort to the post at last with the uncomfortable feeling that a fool was known by his folly. All the same I flew high, for acceptance by the *Netherleigh Guardian* would have brought me a very modified satisfaction; and my daring was justified. My "Attic Thoughts"—which I need hardly say had no connection with Greece or Athens—were favourably received by a certain editor, and a copy of the journal in which the first of them appeared brought spring into my attic and my breast. It is a beginning, anyhow, and whither it may lead who knows?

It was on the evening of the very day that the post had brought me this gratifying news that I was surprised by a visit from Tom Bird. Pimple was with me at the time, and he had just told me that he had determined to begin business on his own account when Harriet brought word that Tom was below and would like to see me if I could spare him a few minutes. Pimple looked disappointed and I am sure he was uneasy for some reason or other during the rest of his stay.

Tom presented a remarkable appearance as he entered, for one eye was so swollen and discoloured as to be practically useless, and he smiled in a self-conscious way as he shook hands.

"I've 'appened a bit of a' accident," he explained; "ran agen summat this afternoon i' broad daylight an' spoiled my beauty." He looked at himself in the glass, laughed, and turned to me again—"Eh, God bless ye, sir, I shall be as reight as rain in a day or two; now if I'm interruptin' you an' Fred 'ere, ye've nowt to do but say so an' I'll get out o' t' road like a plate o' broth on a cold day."

The men evidently knew each other well, and Pimple

joined me in assuring him that he was no intruder. I invited him to bring the basket-chair from the window-recess, and he sat down and made himself at home.

I had been struck with his manners in the padre's kitchen, and I again noticed his unusual ease and self-possession. There was some quality in his quaint drawl that softened the roughness of his dialect, and his quick wit was entirely free from presumption. Tom Bird was in every sense but the conventional one a gentleman, and I could not help contrasting him with Pimple who, good fellow that he is, is always somewhat constrained in my presence, and can hardly be persuaded to sit back in his chair.

"Ye'll wonder what I've come for," he said, "but I can soon put ye out o' yer misery. We was 'avin' our 'Study Circle' at Mr. Chesterfield's o' Saturda' night, an' I asked 'im a question 'at 'e couldn't answer. An' 'e says 'T' next time you're i' Netherla' call an' see Mr. Dick Dallinger, an' if 'e can't tell ye ye'll 'ave to do same as t' old gent when t' 'ighwayman asked 'im for 'is purse—give it up.' "

"Now, Tom," I said warningly; "there's more Bird than Chesterfield in that."

"Well, 'appen so," he replied, "but t' meanin's t' same."

"I'm afraid if you puzzled Mr. Chesterfield it's hopeless to expect enlightenment from me. But what is the question?"

Tom put his hand into the breast pocket of his coat and drew out a folded piece of paper—not too clean—which he passed to me, and on which I read:

"The heart . . .

Wasting its kindness on stocks and stones,  
And on the vacant air."



I looked from the paper to Tom, who was eyeing me anxiously, and who, I fear, found my air vacant. "Can you make it out, sir?" he inquired. "I couldn't remember it all, but I set down what I could."

"It's quite plain," I said, "but where did you pick it up? and what do you want me to do?"

"I got it off a tramp—a man with M.A. at after 'is name, what 'ad been eddicated at Oxford, an' now sleeps i' work'uses an' penny dosses, an' cadges for a livin'. We walked many a mile together, an' 'e told me 'is story, an' repeated poetry no end, but the bit this was out of was extra. 'E'd forgotten t' beginnin', an' 'e wouldn't tell me who wrote it—tried to kid me e' did it 'imself, but 'e couldn't sell me any; an' I'm sick to find that piece, sir."

The lines told me nothing, and I asked Tom if he could give me no further clue.

"There was summat about vi'lets an' a fairy brook," he replied knitting his brow deeply, "an' lyin' down wi' yer 'ead on a mossy stone, an' 'ow good it all was."

"I have it," I said, and reaching down my Wordsworth, after some little search I found the poem called "Nutting", which I read aloud. I could hardly think that Tom would understand it all, but when I put the book on his knee and turned to him his eyes were moist.

"That's it, sir," he said; "that's it. I see it all; I feel it. I ain't a rough chap; God knows I wouldn't 'urt a fly unless it was a hoss fly; but one day I kicked a fellow into t' ditch cos 'e was switchin' t' wild roses off o' t' 'edges wi' 'is stick. 'Rich beyond the wealth of kings!' That's me, that is. I spent an hour this mornin' on t' moor, hearkenin' to t' titlarks, an' watchin' t' young grouse gettin' ready for 'ouse-

keepin' ; and when I got down into t' woods and saw 'ow little spikes o' green was peepin' up out o' t' mould where they're 'll be thousands o' bluebells afore long, and 'ow t' sycamores was full o' tiny buds, as tight shut as a baby fist, I wouldn't ha' swopped places wi' any king i' t' world."

"It was 'sudden happiness beyond all hope,' " I quoted.

"I tell ye what, sir," he said, leaning forward eagerly and adopting a pleading tone ; "I wonder if sometime when ye've nowt much else to do—I'm 'appen takin' a liberty but I'm sick to 'ave that piece—I wonder if you'd write it down for me. I could soon learn it off, an' it 'ud be meat an' drink to me."

I undertook this readily, and received payment on the spot in a handgrasp that spoke more powerfully than words.

I got up to seek a small paper-backed copy of "The Deserted Village," which I felt sure Tom would appreciate, and when I returned to my chair I listened for some time in silence as Pimple and Tom chatted together. An adventurer myself I could not fail to be interested in the subject they were discussing, for it was nothing less than the purpose and value of life. Pimple is just a little aggressive, and I had soon discovered that he had not much patience with his old schoolmate, and it had not taken them many minutes to get to the heart of their differences.

I looked from one to the other and smiled as the fancy seized me that we were three master-mariners who had met by chance for an hour in some port on the ocean of life. Pimple's was the tramp-steamer strongly built for rough work and rough weather and the requirements of commerce. Tom's was the pleasure

yacht, not trim and jaunty it is true, yet light and swift, with little cargo-room. Mine was the old patched-up *Santa Maria*, a crazy craft which no underwriter would insure. To-morrow we should go our several ways—one to trade and make gain, another to revel in the flying scud and the flap of the sail in the breeze, and the third to plunge once more into the uncharted expanse that might mean shipwreck. If Tom were to be trusted—and he was a philosopher and poet—we were all seeking the same haven and might hope with favouring breezes and stout hearts to get there at last. According to him the one end of all our efforts—the one goal, indeed, of all mankind, was happiness ; but whilst some (to continue my metaphor) hugged the coast, and bartered their way slowly towards the Promised Land, others like himself struck boldly out into the sunlit seas and found the harbour of their hopes was nearer than men thought.

Poor Pimple was puzzled. He had an idea that truth was enshrined in venerable proverbs as, for example, that rolling-stones gather no moss. Tom, himself a maker of proverbs, was an iconoclast in regard to some of these ancient figures and destroyed them ruthlessly. Why should a stone gather moss ? What good did the moss do it ? Tom tore away the veil of metaphor. Money was the moss Pimple was anxious to gather because money to him represented happiness. " That's where ye mak' yer mistake, Fred lad. Many a man spends so much time moss 'untin' 'at 'appiness passes 'im by an' 'e never sees it."

Pimple frowned and struggled to express his thoughts. Labour was good and money was good, for it kept a man's head above water and preserved his self-respect. He thanked God he was in no man's debt. This



was a slight thrust at Tom, and there was just a touch of Pharisaism in the retort, but Tom was not disconcerted.

There are times when the man loses himself and grows eloquent, and this was one of them. The quaint drawl became impressive as he pointed out the fallacy of Pimple's reasoning, and showed how we are all heavily in debt to others. My eyes glistened, I am sure, as he acknowledged that his own obligations were so heavy that he was nothing better than a bankrupt. To the schoolmaster who had caned him; to the little child who smiled into his face as he passed; to the women who gave him a kind word, and the men who provided him with food in exchange for work; to the great master-minds of the past; to the birds which made melody; to the flowers and trees that painted the landscape, and to Him who made them all—he was for ever and hopelessly in debt.

“Tom,” I said, “you are a poet.”

His face brightened, for he is one of those men to whom encouragement is as the refreshing dew.

“God bless ye, sir,” he replied, treating the suggestion as if it were well-meant humour; “ther’s poetry in a muck-’eap if ye’ve eyes to see it, an’ ther’s ’appen some i’ Tom Bird, but ’ow to get it out o’ both on ’em beats me. It’s same as tryin’ to draw water out of a well wi’ a corkscrew.”

Pimple left us at this point, and I was a little surprised that Tom remained, but I was soon to realise that all that had gone before had been mere preliminary to the real object of his visit.

No sooner had the door closed upon Pimple than he turned to me and his voice sobered. He wasted no time on introductory remarks.

"What I really called to tell ye, sir, was 'at Miss Chestyfield is a bit upset like, an' chance anyone should bring a wrong tale an' put ye about, I thowt I'd slip down myself, so as ye needn't worry."

That is what he said as near as I remember. What strikes me now is the insight and kindly thoughtfulness of the man. Nobody had asked him to come or known that he was coming, and nobody could have told him that I was interested in Doris. Truly I am in debt to him and to the intelligent angel that watches over my interests. At the time nothing struck me but the news, and that, as Harriet would say, struck me "all of a heap."

I cannot record it in his words, but I will set down briefly an outline of the double adventure which had befallen Doris, and which, I am sorry to say, caused me to have to call upon the "A" mixture before the night was out.

Early in the afternoon of that day Doris had been in Heatherdyke, visiting, I do not doubt, that evergreen of a Thorn who is responsible for so much unpleasantness. On her way home she passed the blacksmith's cottage, where her first adventure took place.

Boyle, it appears, has a son—a bright little fellow seven or eight years old, strong and sturdy for his years, and the pride of his father. He has also a wife who had had some trouble with a cheeky member of the beggar and tramp fraternity, and for her protection the smith had bought a dog—an Airedale—and as savage a one as he could find, and chained it up near the door. No one dared go near, not even Carmi; and Boyle just laughed, and the more the neighbours foretold trouble and threatened what they would do when it came, the more he was amused.

Just as Doris drew near the cottage little Peterkin, as the neighbours call him, was coming home from school. He may have teased the dog, nobody knows, for he had much of his father's spirit and had never shown any fear of it; anyhow, it set upon him as he was entering the house and mangled him frightfully.

Doris rushed to his help. She had an empty basket upon her arm and with this poor weapon she beat the dog with all her might. It was all over in a minute, for the smith, hearing the noise, rushed out of his shop and settled the brute with one blow of his hammer.

The kiddie was unconscious, and after he had been seen to by a doctor they got him to the hospital at Spa. Doris had escaped with one vicious snap, and had walked home with her left hand bandaged.

It was whilst on the way there that she met with her second adventure. In a snug little hollow by the roadside a travelling gipsy had drawn up his caravan, and was sitting smoking upon the steps. A ragged girl—a mere child—was walking towards him holding a jug in both hands, when she tripped over a stone and fell to the ground, smashing the jug and spilling the contents.

The man sprang to his feet with an oath, and seizing the child by the hair beat and kicked her without mercy.

Her screams were terrifying, and Doris's blood must have boiled. What the padre would have done in her place I do not know, but she ran down the slope and confronted the man with blazing eyes.

"You coward!" she said. "Let her go instantly."

For answer the man dealt the child a blow on the head that straightway silenced her screams and sent her stunned to the ground, and Doris lost control. A whip was lying on the ground a few yards away, and, picking it up, she lashed the man with all her might.



I tremble to think what would have happened to her if a labourer who was near at hand had not come to her rescue. The newcomer used the stock of the whip in warding off the man's blows, and covered Doris's retreat to the high road ; and the approach of reinforcements caused the scoundrel to follow his wife into the caravan where the child had already been carried.

Doris's saviour had accompanied her home, and it was from his lips, I gathered, that Tom had heard the story. He must have gone to Overburn to see her for she had told him herself about her encounter with the dog, and he was thus able to assure me that she was little the worse for her adventures.

That was all very well, of course, for Tom, but imagine my state of mind. Visions of hydrophobia, of nervous collapse, and a hundred other horrible contingencies hung before my eyes and turned me sick.

Tom had no sooner gone than I made my way down to the telephone and rang up Irving. And let me here record my conviction that if there is a cold and heartless medico in Yorkshire, Irving is that man. He absolutely and emphatically refused to go to Overburn on several grounds. It was not necessary ; he was not the Chesterfield's doctor ; and he had not been sent for.

Talk about mummies ! There is as much red tape wound about some professional men as would serve for wrappings to half a dozen of the most lavishly-embalmed mummies in all Egypt.

Dad carried me back to my room, and I spent a wretched night. Did I say my ship was in port that evening ? Then the storm outside must have been particularly bad for my brain reeled and tossed the night through.

## CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH DORIS IS MADE PRISONER AND I AM MADE  
HAPPY

**D**AYLIGHT came at last, struggling into my room through a blanket of damp fog, and my spirits dropped to zero. It was evident that there was going to be no chance of seeing Doris or the padre and learning the worst. For, of course, the worst was going to happen. Unless my experience differs from other people's, the worst always does happen when you lie awake in the darkness to keep trouble company; and how many times during the night I accompanied Doris to the Pasteur Institute and noted the sorrowful shake of the head that followed the examination of her wound I do not know.

Having nothing better to do when morning came I busied myself in counting the number of dots and dashes that formed the dividing line between the paper and the stencilled frieze on the wall opposite the bed, and dividing them by five. Five, of course, is the number of letters that compose the word Doris. As there were eighty-four of these symbols my repeated endeavours to make an even quotient were always defeated—five into eight-four insisted on being one short of seventeen. Then I tried "Doris Chesterfield" with a similar disappointing result. Waxing bold and desperate, for I felt I should go mad if I couldn't do

a bit of simple arithmetic like that, I tried "Doris Dallinger"; triumphed, and slept until my breakfast tray came up.

The afternoon brought sunshine and the padre. That is not meant for metaphor, though the padre also brought sunshine and dissipated my fears. It was good of him to come, for his asthma was still troublesome, but he wished to bring us the news, or to relieve our anxiety if we should have heard it.

He spent some time with mother before coming up to see me, and when I heard his step upon the stair I detected a difference in the spring, but his spirit was as buoyant as ever.

He would not say much about Doris's adventures, but dismissed them lightly. "The dear child was shaken," he said, nodding his head and repeating the word, as if courage of that order were the merest trifle; "and she is now all right. The sore is a little one, and the pain, my friend, is not more than she can bear."

I pestered him with inquiries, but was compelled at length to accept the doctor's verdict that no serious results were likely to follow. Perhaps the intimation that she was going to pay us a visit within a few days did more than anything else to set my mind at rest.

I brightened considerably, and was sufficiently relieved to remember Pimple and his vendetta. The padre listened with interest, but to my surprise made no comment.

"He is a joiner, you say, and he is commencing business on his own account. My friend, you will write down for me his name and address in my pocket-book, for the lines are faint, and Time has dulled my sight a little; though I am an obstinate old man and refuse the aid of glasses."



I wrote it down and he read it out aloud. "That is good," he said. "I shall find some work for our friend, and when he has got to know me we will have a little quiet talk together, this Pimple of yours and I."

We had a talk that was not always quiet, for the padre's speech bubbles and splashes with mirth and wit, and a hearty emphasis is never long absent from it.

I asked about Ephraim, and the old man's face became grave and his voice tender.

"Ephraim, my friend, is in the valley of desolation just now, and no ray of God's sunshine reaches him there. He is very troubled, and his one prayer is that the good Lord should take him away from the evil to come. I confess to you that I am impressed by him and made a little uneasy against my better judgment. I do not know what mysterious waves of spiritual energy are caught by that disordered brain of his, and I admit that his premonitions may be nothing more than illusions. But he is very sure himself, and his jeremiads have taken hold of me, though they cannot move me from the sure rock on which I stand. He uses the language of the old Hebrew prophets and foresees nothing but disaster and world upheaval. I tell you, my dear Dallinger, that, though I am an old man with faith in the loving providence of the great Father, my flesh creeps a little when I listen to Ephraim's 'Woes.'"

I remarked that it must be bad for Mrs. Pegg, and the padre agreed, but added :

"There is, however, one consoling reflection. Our good Mother Pegg has not the modern affliction of nerves, and her husband's lamentations are to her as unintelligible as the Apocalypse, and are nothing but a further softening of the brain that calls for a warmer

and more helpful solicitude. That woman makes me feel very humble ; and I think when she crosses over to the other side she will have a place found for her where I could wish to be."

When he rose to leave, I asked him to tell Doris how eagerly I should look forward to her visit, and that I hoped she would contrive to spend a long day with us, and he replied with great good humour :

" My dear boy, we will make arrangements to have her delivered with the morning milk, or as soon thereafter as may be possible. She is eager to come—indeed the dear child is a little excited also, because "—and here he nodded his head and looked down at me mischievously (for he is taller than I), " because she has to see the dressmaker about a new costume. You may be sure, therefore, she will not delay."

It was not the explanation I had been foolish enough to hope for, but I had grace enough to laugh, and conceit enough to believe that the new costume was not the predominant cause of her excitement.

Fickle February appeared to do its best for her on the appointed day. Instead of skies alternately grey and blue, we had a morning of dazzling sunshine ; and spring paid us a surprise visit to see, no doubt, how the preparations for her reception were progressing. The strong light awoke me in good time, and I dressed as soon as I had breakfasted, and sat in the window to enjoy the fresh morning air. I was there when dad came up, as he invariably does before he goes to the Works, and his first remark showed him to be in a silly mood.

" Hello, Dick ! You'll hardly be able to make her out on the Overburn road, my lad, with the naked eye, but I'll send you my field-glasses up. Or shall I run round to see if Stafford left his prismatic ? "

I declined both offers with what was meant for an air of scornful indifference, but within five minutes of his departure Harriet brought the field-glasses up, and as they were there I made use of them.

It was both hard luck and hard fact that I was decidedly out of sorts that morning, and still harder luck that Irving should call and discover it and forbid me to go downstairs. I know I looked as stormy as I felt, but when I explained why, the sky cleared somewhat.

"Oh, a little mild company will do you no harm," he replied; "but you are better up here, all the same. Who knows that I'm not a special providence!" There was some sarcasm in the suggestion, I know, but many a true word is spoken in sarcasm.

Doris came quite early in the morning; and it is unbelievable, but true, that I saw nothing of her until after dinner. I should have said that it was not possible that "a mother's tender care" could have permitted, much less designed, such a thing, but Sandy drove the two ladies to the dressmaker's before I was even allowed to say "How-do" over the banisters.

I had almost the whole afternoon with her, however. As a stickler for the proprieties mother is becoming as bad as Mrs. Grundy herself. She sat with us as long as her conscience allowed her, and would have come back earlier than she did if dad—as I have only just discovered—had not met Miss Janet in the town, and hinted that an extended call would be regarded as a friendly act (he did not say in what quarter) and particularly if it had the appearance of spontaneity.

What a sense of freshness came into the room with her. In her plain navy-blue skirt (it really was navy-blue), with tartan blouse open at the throat and negligently fastened with a large cameo brooch, she looked



a picture capable of inspiring the most inveterate mummy. Her step was light, her eyes sparkled, and it was evident that the shadow of the Pasteur Institute had not fallen upon her.

"Well," she said, holding out both her hands, "and how's the mummy? Is it able to sit up and eat solid food or is it at the spoon stage?"

This was before mother went down, and we spent the time talking about costumes, the abnormal growth of Fanny, the Peggs and their trials, and so on. It was very refreshing water though it flowed along very ordinary channels.

When we were alone I began to live more gloriously.

"I say, Doris," I said (she has always insisted on my calling her Doris, and she is supposed to have consented to call me Dick, but doesn't) "you don't know what a shock you gave me the other day. You mustn't run into danger like that." I looked serious and spoke gravely, and she pouted. It was only a pretence, but she looked adorable.

"Now you're going to be paternal," she said. "It comes natural, I suppose, when you're so frightfully old; but please don't. I like you ever so much better when you're young."

The pout dissolved into a smile, and the smile broke into a ripple of laughter. "You really are an old solemn-sides this afternoon; but there, I forgot you had a bad headache. Now lay your head well back on your chair and I'll cure it."

It was too good an opportunity to be missed, and I obeyed. I would not like to swear that I did not try to look rather pathetically ill in order that the treatment—whatever it might be—should be prolonged.

Doris drew from her work-bag the tiniest of hand-

kerchiefs, with an embroidered D in one corner, and folded it into an oblong pad. She then produced a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, and sprinkled the pad liberally.

"Now," she said, as she placed it on my forehead, "you must keep perfectly still, or it will fall off. The hand that was not bandaged pressed lightly, oh so very lightly, against my brow, and an electric thrill ran through me.

It was a remedy that never had the least effect upon me—the eau-de-Cologne, I mean—but it was not likely I was going to tell her so.

She was half-sitting on the arm of my chair, but when my head gently touched her arm she removed her hand and rose. "Is that better?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, hesitatingly; "at least it was as long as your hand was there. I think it was the pressure that did it."

I stole a glance at her face, and thought there was a little more colour in it, but she only laughed and put her hand on my brow again, and after a while gently bathed my temples with the spirit. Then she ran her fingers through my hair for quite a long time, and I lay back with closed eyes and saw visions, becoming conscious at last that the headache had left me.

I told her so, and she sat down again and I returned to the subject we had abandoned.

"I don't know," I grumbled, "however you had the courage to strike that gipsy fellow. He might have killed you. It was a rash thing to do."

I ought to have seen the mischievous look in her eyes, but she spoke so demurely that I was thrown off my guard. "I suppose you think it would have been better to have given him a tract, but you see I hadn't one with me. Now, just tell me what you would

have done? I mean . . . I mean . . .” she stammered—and the blood rushed to her face this time—“if you’d been as strong as I am.”

“Oh,” I replied, “if I’d been as strong as all that I should have horse-whipped him as a matter of course. Still, I think you’d better not try it on again. The hero in fustian might not be standing in the wings next time to rescue the plucky heroine. There’s such a thing as recklessness, you know.”

“Thank you so much for your little lecture,” she said, dropping her eyes for a moment. Then she looked at me with quite a different expression.

“Do you know there’s something I must tell you. I’m not a bit brave, and I was horribly afraid all the time, and when I’d done it I should have liked to cry, but of course that was out of the question. But really I’m quite a coward.” She shuddered at the recollection. “It was horrible.”

I think she said, “Oh, Dick, it was horrible!” but my ears may have deceived me.

It was an inspiration that caused me to take her wrist and feel her pulse; and forgetfulness, perhaps, that led me to retain my hold of it longer than was necessary. I fancy my beat was quicker than hers, but it settled down when she gently withdrew her hand.

“By the way,” I said at length, “who was the man who came to your help? I never thought of asking Tom, and I want to see him.”

Doris looked at me and burst out laughing. “Why, you stupid boy, it was Tom himself. I thought you knew.”

“But he said he’d seen the fellow who did it,” I protested, in excuse of my lack of wit.

“No doubt he had,” she laughed, “in a shop window



as he came up the street. Oh, you short-sighted Diogenes ! Did you need a lantern to see his swollen eye ? ”

I could only laugh, of course, and we talked about Tom until the gathering darkness attracted our notice. “ We have longer daylight at Overburn,” said Doris.

We went over to the window together, and saw to our surprise that the sky was overcast and that snow was falling. Doris became anxious. “ I’ve to get home to-night,” she said. “ There’s the father to think of.”

“ Oh, you’ll get home all right,” I said confidently. “ We must expect a bit of snow at times yet. We’re not even into March you must remember.”

We returned to our chairs by the fire, but when I heard the whistle of the rising wind, and a little later the lusty singing of a couple of missel-thrushes I became rather uneasy myself, though mingled with that feeling was another much more pleasurable.

Doris heard the birds and said :

“ Listen ! There are the storm-cocks ! It’s going to be a wild night. Ought I not to go home at once ? ”

She rose again, and I followed her to the window. Then my heart leaped.

“ Unless the storm abates you cannot go home to-night, Doris,” I said. “ There is a gale coming, and by the look of the sky we are going to have the biggest fall of snow this season. You’re not really anxious, are you ? ”

Doris’s eyes were fixed on the hills now rapidly vanishing from sight. Her hand, hanging by her side, touched mine, and I held it—such a warm, soft hand.

“ I am,” she replied. “ I’m horribly anxious, because the poor father will worry about me ; and he’ll have an

attack of asthma, as he always does at the most inopportune times, and there'll be nobody whatever to look after him. I'm going home."

She disengaged her hand and prepared to leave me when mother came in, followed almost immediately by dad. Mother came to see what was to be done; dad to lay down the law upon the subject.

The Upper House was most emphatic:

"It's no use talking about anxious this and anxious that, she can't get there, my dear, and that's a fact. It's a pity, but we've got to face it. I called as I came up to see if anyone 'ud taxi her over, but they won't listen to it. Said by the time they got half-way there they'd neither be able to get forward nor back. I'm very sorry, my dear" (this to Doris), "but we've just got to make the best of it. Where can we telephone to?"

That was practical, anyhow, but before the message had been arranged Doris was herself summoned to the telephone. When she returned she informed us that her father had sent word that she was on no account to attempt to return home as the roads were even then impassable, and that Pimple would perforce remain overnight in the house. It appeared that he had already begun work for the padre, and the knowledge that he was at hand and that Fanny would not leave, either, set Doris's mind at rest to a great extent.

It all worked well for me. After tea mother was compelled to assist the maids in urgent matters of bed-airing and the like, and dad, who was supposed to chaperone us, proved restless and unreliable. Whatever faults dad may have he is something of a sportsman, I willingly acknowledge.

We sat quite close together and talked with perfect understanding and absolute freedom about things that concerned us both—my prospects, for instance, as a writer, and her future when at some remote and hardly-to-be-conceived period her father should be taken from her. It all came about quite naturally, and it strengthened the bond of intimacy. She put her hand on mine once when mother had made some reference to my weakness, and did it openly and without self-consciousness, and said, "Never mind, we've learned how to pull, haven't we? The Golden Age lies ahead."

I can hardly describe my sensations as I lay upon my back in the darkness that night. I was in a state of miserable happiness. Some imp of the imagination kept holding that wretched Notice Board before my eyes, and the more I tried to close them the more legible the letters became. At the same time I heard the sound of many voices which battled for my attention, but I stuffed metaphorical fingers into my ears and settled down into my pillows. By and by, scruple and conscience went off to sleep, and left me dozing in dreamland, where I had a very good time for a minute or two. Then the noise outside roused me. The storm was raging pitilessly. The gale whistled in the shrillest key as it tore round the house, driving and harrying the gentle snowflakes which whirled in ghostly columns higher than the roof, then fell rapidly to the ground and rushed with mad haste to the shelter of hedge and wall. We had stood at the window, she and I, before the last good-night had been said, and had found the scene one of wild and fearful grandeur. I could see little of it as I lay wakeful in bed, but some time after midnight the



moon sailed out into the billowy sky, and I saw that the snow had ceased to fall. But the storm fiend would not rest, and I fell asleep to the sound of his strident voice and the crack of his whip in the swaying branches of the trees.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### IN WHICH THE PADRE HAS A VISION AND PIMPLE AN AWAKENING

**H**OW little any of us realised as we slept peacefully through the storm that there was tragedy on the moorland highroad beyond Overburn, and that those who were dear to us were playing the unrehearsed parts of heroes. It was well we did not know; well that no foreboding message was carried to our senses by the couriers of that mad tempest. I am grateful, at any rate, that one gentle spirit was undisturbed during that fateful night.

How lovely the world looked from my window the next morning. The wind had gone mumbling to its caverns, and the sun was shining down upon a world in white. From our standpoint (I use the plural because Doris was with me) little could be seen of the nearer roadways, but from that little we could tell that even here there were deep snowdrifts along one side, and Doris pulled a face as she nodded in the direction of Overburn.

"I'll telephone," she said; "happy thought!"

She came back in a few minutes. "I can't get them," she said. "The girl thinks the wire is broken. They are having no end of trouble."

I was pleased; but my pleasure was short-lived.

Just before noon Pimple arrived. We were all

downstairs at the time, and Irving was with us, relating his earlier morning experiences. Harriet came into the room to ask if the doctor would please step into the kitchen, and her face told us that something was amiss, and by and by mother and the doctor returned and informed us in the most matter-of-fact way that Pimple had got through, and that it would be as well for Doris to return home as soon as possible, lest there should be a further downfall.

"I'm going in that direction myself," said the doctor indifferently; "if you care to risk it and come with me."

Doris looked at him. Her face was rather white, but her tone was firm.

"I would rather you told me," she said. "Of course the man has not hurried back and asked for you for nothing. Is it father?"

Irving laughed, and that reassured her, though it had not quite the same effect on me. I knew the various gradations of Irving's laughs.

"What suspicious creatures women are," he said. "If your father should happen to be ill when we get there you will say you had an intuition. It's a case, however, of John Boyle rather than your father, though your father and that young man have had a hand in the pie. But Mrs. Dallinger will tell you. Do you think you can manage to be ready in a quarter-hour if I call for you, and we'll make an attempt to get through?"

Mother told us what she knew, and shortly afterwards Doris left us. She was still white, but outwardly cheerful and self-possessed. Pimple went with them; and it was not until he returned towards the end of the week that I got the full story—indeed, the full story



was a mosaic to which Irving and Doris contributed as well as he.

I will put it together as well as I can, and try to keep imagination within limits. I do not think I shall go far wrong in that direction, for Pimple's narrative was direct and vivid.

When the storm burst the padre had quickly recognised the impossibility of Doris's return and had sent Pimple across to the vicarage to telephone his message. Pimple had needed no persuasion to remain overnight, and the two had settled down to an evening of comfort and conversation.

The padre soon got Pimple's story from him. With all his intensity of purpose, Pimple is simple-hearted and open, and the padre's manner invites confidences. The whole tale was told as they sat with slippered feet upon the hearth; and the tempest in the man's heart was in tune with that which thundered down the valley below.

"My friend, I know all about it," said the padre, and he placed his hand upon his companion's arm with a touch that somehow lulled the storm a little, "and I have known it for many months. And I understand and sympathise. You have been carrying a heavy weight all these years, and it has grown heavier as weights will when we burden them with black and leaden thoughts. And now in the good providence of God you have come to me, and I will help you to cut the cords which bind this burden to you, and you will forgive and find peace."

I can imagine the look that came into Pimple's eyes. He told me that at that word he felt harder than ever, though his heart went out to the old man at his side.

"I can't forgive," he said through his set teeth; "an' I may as well be honest—I won't."

"I know, my friend. You have drunk of a bitter cup, but now you are adding to the bitterness, and you are calling the bitter sweet. But in the dregs of that cup are poison and death, and you will not drink them. It is given me to know that you will stop short of that; and I am glad for your mother's sake, for in the day that you find peace your mother's heart will be at rest."

"My mother!" Pimple was startled.

"My dear wife comes and talks to me often when the night is dark. I do not mistake her voice. We are near each other still. And your mother was a good woman and you were her only son and she loved you. Be sure she is very near you, but her voice cannot reach a heart that is full of evil spirits. One day, and very soon, please God, you will cast them out, and your mother will tell you that you have completed her joy."

Pimple felt his eyes fill with tears, but the padre changed the subject and spoke brightly of other things. His pipes were musical enough that night, and before he went to bed he was breathing with difficulty, but he invited Pimple to kneel at his side by the fire whilst he commended themselves and all belonging to them to the loving care of the All-merciful Father.

And now I come to that which many would find it hard to understand and difficult to believe. If Horatio had lived until the present age he would have found his old philosophy woefully inadequate, and his respect for the prophetic gifts of the Prince of Denmark would have grown immeasurably. When

Marconi first sent his messages on the wings of the wind to be read by those who were fitted to receive them, there must have been thousands who echoed the thought: "O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!" And therefore I am not going to boggle over a mystery which has been outside my dreams and which may become a commonplace when men's spiritual receivers are as sensitive as that of the padre. I record the tale as it was told to me, and in good faith.

Fanny was sleeping in Doris's bed, and the padre, who had a fire in his room, had arranged a shake-down for Pimple in the dining-room.

Pimple fell asleep at once, and was awakened at midnight by the padre, who was standing over him fully dressed, and with a candle in his hand. "We are wanted outside. Dress quickly, my friend," he said.

Pimple rubbed his eyes and looked about him, wondering if he still dreamed. The dying embers of the fire and the smoking flame of the candle threw ghostly shadows about the room, and his slumbering senses came but slowly to his help.

That lasted only a minute or two, however. He threw off the clothes, and with a soldier's instinct of unquestioning obedience began to draw on his trousers as the old man lit the lamp.

"You will lose no time, my friend," said the padre, "and I will tell you what I know. As I lay just now between sleep and consciousness I became certain that some poor soul was perishing in a snowdrift. I lay still, but the message came clearly, peremptorily: 'Arise quickly and save life.' I know nothing more, but we must not disobey the vision, and you will help me, I am sure."



Pimple said that the thought of distrusting the vision never even stood upon the threshold of his mind. The padre had no misgivings, and by the mysterious authority of the stronger soul he conveyed his assurance to his companion. Another consideration, however, occurred to him, and he protested that the padre was in no fit state of health for such an adventure; but he was overruled—personal considerations weigh little with the padre.

They set off, and seeing a light in a shed on the outskirts of the village, explored a little and pressed Farmer Jackson into their service. He had been sitting up with a sick cow and he followed like one dazed, willing but uncomprehending.

I try to picture that adventure—I, who have never in my life set my foot on snow—but I have to trust to Pimple's vigorous outlines. It will all be etched into his memory, I know, as long as memory lasts.

It was terrible, he said, even for strong men like the farmer and himself. Here and there the path was swept bare and dry, and then a few yards farther on all trace of it was lost, and they battled forward breast-high in snow.

More than once the farmer despaired. It was madness; they would be caught in the drifts like rats in a trap—but nothing could stop the padre, who encouraged them by word and example, and who in spite of his infirmity led the way. Who else, indeed, could have led it? It was not until they reached a stretch of wind-swept road that Pimple could tell his companion what he knew, and to the farmer it was nothing better than a wild-goose chase.

Suddenly the moon shone out and the scene became vividly bright. The padre had gained upon them,

and they saw him striding along a narrow strip of road at the foot of a huge snowdrift which sloped up to the height of the hedge on the other side. They were in the lane that climbed steeply up to the highroad from Spa, and were now not far from Heatherdyke. The gale picked up the loose snow and lashed it in their faces. At times it thrust against their breasts with a giant's strength until they had to fight their way with gasping breath, but ever the tall form in front outdistanced them.

When they neared the top of the lane the little footway ended in a great drift of snow, and they got up to the padre, who was standing irresolute. He was breathing hard, but his assurance was firm and strong—the Hand that had guided them so far would guide them to the end.

The farmer had felt no guiding hand, but he saw that there was a chance of creeping up the bottom of the hedge; and the padre was on his hands and knees in an instant. How they reached the highroad, however, Pimple does not know. Their hands and faces were scratched and bleeding, and their exhaustion was extreme, but they stood together at the top in the shelter of a tree at last, and the padre, who was breathing noisily, was glad to lean against it for support.

"It is all right, my friends," he panted; "I feel that our efforts will not be in vain. Let us search among these snowdrifts without delay."

How did he know? The problem baffles me. The padre himself does not seek to solve it: he just yielded himself to the influences that controlled him and *knew*.

Five minutes later they found him they sought. A man had fallen into the ditch and broken his ankle,

as they afterwards learned, and was lying there with his head against a gate, white almost as the snow that covered his body, and unconscious—perhaps dead.

Pimple found him and gave a cry, and the others hurried up. "I may as well tell you it was my father, John Boyle," he explained.

Only one of the three knew what was to be done, and that was Pimple himself, and whilst Farmer Jackson made his way to the Heatherdyke Arms, some hundred yards away, to summon help, he and the padre worked hard to restore animation to the inanimate form before them.

The padre's brandy flask was in his pocket, and they forced some of the spirit between the man's teeth. More than once Pimple stopped from downright exhaustion, but the padre encouraged him with the certainty of his faith.

They got Boyle to the inn at last, and before then the spark of life had become a tiny flame which burnt more brightly as the hours went by.

In the morning willing hands dug a way back for the padre, who was really ill, and now all anxiety to be home again; and Pimple hurried down as fast as the roads would let him for the assistance that was so badly needed. The wires were down and no other course was possible.

The explanation of the accident was simple enough. Boyle had walked the nine miles to Spa to see his child in the early afternoon, and had spent a couple of hours in a music hall and so delayed his return until night. No snow had fallen in that neighbourhood, but he had met the storm as he journeyed back. He was a strong man, however, and the gale had no terrors for him. But when his foot had caught in a



treacherous hole beneath the snow ; when he had heard and felt the snap, he had realised something of his danger. He had dragged himself with difficulty and in extreme pain a hundred yards or so farther down the road, and had rested a while against the gate ; and that was all he had known until he had found himself between warm blankets in the wayside inn at Heatherdyke. And with the memory of it all upon him his first words had been a curse, and his later ones unlicensed blasphemy, yet he was a man for whom God must have cared if the padre's vision was of heavenly origin.

It is all very puzzling, but two facts at least emerge Pimple is a changed man, and the padre is very ill.

Poor Doris !

## CHAPTER XXVII

### IN WHICH I BRIDGE A GULF OF FOUR MONTHS

I HAVE been very busy these last months and rather fidgety too, and though I have entered into life with no less zest, I have felt disinclined to record life's experiences. I have been reading the last entry or two in my memoirs, however, and now the mood is upon me to bridge the gulf between that day and this. These engineering feats interest me if they serve no other useful purpose, and they show me what manner of man I am when I go to work conscientiously. I am beginning to be afraid of myself, somehow. I suspect that I want to build the bridge without using all the material that has been accumulated, and that is a sort of jerry-building that my better self abhorreth.

Exactly four months have passed away, and it is now the last week in June. As I recall the past the first to answer my silent summons is Hannibal Wood. I smile as he steps before me and I remember how I left him upon his bed unconscious of the surprise in cap and apron that awaited him on his awakening. How he had stood the shock I could not learn, and the reports of his progress were so dry and tasteless that my imagination starved for want of nourishment. "He was doing nicely." "He was downstairs again." "The nurse had left." "He was 'his old self.'"

I pause there. "His old self," was he? That was the message dad brought me, and it ought to have been correct for he had sent it himself, so I took it for truth and dropped it and him from my mind until one evening towards the end of May when I was sauntering along the lane and the man passed me.

He was not alone. I admit it was spring and I know what the poets say about the season, but I should have been no more surprised to see the iris on the burnished dove as lively as a peacock's plumes than I was to meet Hannibal Wood linked by the arm to a young woman and clasping both her hands in his own palm. He had the grace to look confused as he went by, but his eye twinkled merrily enough, and the wind was so taken from me that I omitted to return his greeting and rudely followed him with a stare.

Realising my rudeness I said nothing to anybody but walked down to the Airlee road the next evening, my mouth watering for tarts which I felt sure were to be found there this time.

My walk is not much better than a crawl, but I am stronger than I used to be, and can even journey up and down stairs at my own speed, which is that of the tortoise, so that a little expedition of this kind on a fine evening causes neither anxiety nor comment.

The shop was closed, but the kitchen door was open, and I crossed the little passage and found Hannibal sitting at the table biting the end of a lead pencil, and with a sheet of paper in front of him. He covered this with his arm when he saw me in the doorway, and a little later smuggled it into his pocket. I remembered that Hannibal had been accustomed to parody "The Brook" in his spare moments.



He made me welcome, laughing in a way that said he knew why I had come. "It was a fair cop," he exclaimed before I uttered a word.

Of course I wanted him to bare his breast, and he needed little encouragement. "The card has gone, I see," I said by way of a beginning.

He ignored this introduction and went straight to the heart of things. In the semi-darkness his eye twinkled like a star, but he was no longer shame-faced.

"I was a goner from t' first minute," he said. "Helpless as a baby, I was, and she just did as she liked with me, did t' lass. I threw my arms up and surrendered."

"Without a shot?" I suggested.

"I'd neither gun nor powder," he chuckled; "when I opened my peepies and saw her standing over me I'd no breath left, and she was that nice and soothing 'at I could have lifted up my voice and wept."

I laughed, partly at his words and partly at his droll expression.

"That was what Jacob did when he kissed Rachel," I remarked. "I suppose the two cases are not parallel?"

He thought this out for a moment before he replied. "If Rachel was ought like Susie I could have understood it better if Jacob had wept 'cos she wouldn't let him kiss her."

"You *have* got it badly," I said sympathetically; "does it hurt much?"

"Not now," he replied. "I can stand kidding. Why, I'd get in front o' ten mad ponies afore I'd miss a pain like that. I didn't know I was born till that lass come."

I looked across at him humorously, but he was not disconcerted. "I didn't," he repeated.

He told me all about it, then, right up to the point where he had proposed that the engagement should become permanent. "She didn't just see it i' that light at first," he concluded; "but——"

The pause was significant, yet I could not resist the temptation to bridge the gap. "But you 'nattered' her until she yielded, I suppose."

His reply was not directly to the point.

"Yon lass hasn't a bit of natter about her," he said. Then he chuckled. "And besides, you know, sir, I shall feel safer to have her about. It's same as t' vaccination; you take t' pox to keep t' pox off."

I have still the bad habit of lying awake and thinking. My brain seems most active at night, and I have had my bed drawn nearer to the window so that I can see the sky and the moorland and the birds in the topmost branches of the trees. Fact and fancy have been my servants during these wakeful hours, and they have waited upon me assiduously so that the time has rarely dragged. Dad grumbles at me and asserts that he trained himself when he was young to go to sleep when he got into bed. He says it is nature, but I tell him if he slept where I do (or should I say if he kept awake where I do?) he would see that Nature has her variations, for though the staid rooks go to sleep apparently as soon as they tuck the clothes around them, the loquacious starlings will often jabber and quarrel the night through—veritable rakes of the feathered tribe.

That is fact, and Hannibal's engagement was also fact, but when fact has occupied the stage awhile fancy

comes tripping to the front and dances before my eyes as I lie and look through the open window in this pleasant month of June when darkness takes holiday, and day peeps impatiently over the shoulders of night.

Shall I set down what form my fancy takes or shall I forbear? Shall I admit that I can envy a cobbler's health and happiness? I am afraid to let myself go. My pen pulls and I restrain it; yet I will venture just a little. It is Doris, always Doris. Doris, tending her father with the most filial tenderness. Doris, queen of the household, superintending the little maid, now half a head taller than herself. Doris, ironically facetious with her best friend and admirer. But I must stop, or I shall analyse my feelings and that I dare not do. After all, this is supposed to be a record, not a rhapsody.

Let me get on to safer ground. What of Pimple and the padre?

Pimple, poor fellow, has come within measurable distance of proving a nuisance, though he has never quite got to that. I have found it advisable to work hard for reasons that I need not refer to; I have written much and read more, and Pimple has visited me oftener than has been quite convenient, though I have got into the way of going on with my work and leaving him to his own devices. He sits and reads if he finds I do not want to be disturbed, on the chance of a half-hour's conversation later on when I lay down my pen; or sometimes he steals so quietly away that his departure passes unnoticed.

I often return in my thoughts to that midnight call that came to the padre and wonder if it was not really meant for Pimple, but caught by the more sensitive



and spiritual receiver of the older man. It seems very wonderful and from some points of view almost freakish, for most men would say that John Boyle was not worth saving at the risk of such a life as that of the padre. One could understand it better if the experience had led to reformation of character such as one is accustomed to read about in religious books, but that has not been the case. The smith is as sullen, as obstinate, as wedded to his cast-iron theories as ever ; and if he is grateful for what was done for him on that wild night he is very successful in concealing his true feelings. When he was well enough to realise what had happened and all that his rescue had involved, he said with a sneer which I hope masked a more human sentiment :

“ So he dreamed, did he ? Well, the old chap’s spunk enough, anyway, but I suppose ’e thinks ’e’ll get another jewel in his crown up above. ’E’d have done me a kindness to let me lie.”

My blood boiled at the time, and it needs little imagination to realise what the neighbours both felt and said. From that moment the blacksmith, always an object of fear and dislike, became a social pariah to be avoided as much as possible.

Pimple did not share this feeling nor does he yet. I have studied him carefully and tried to analyse his emotions, but I do not fully understand him. He hates his father’s ways but he no longer hates his father, and all trace of venom has disappeared. I should much like to know how the seed which was dropped into his heart that wintry night beside the padre’s fire germinated and grew so quickly. In spite of the hard exterior it must have been kindly soil below.

Pimple himself says little, but his explanation is given in one word—mother, and I let it rest at that. The fact is Pimple was infected by the padre's mysticism ; and because he thinks his mother knows and is made glad he visits his father and endures his profanities ; is kind to the woman who is not his father's wife ; and loves and serves the lame little Peterkin whom the father seems now almost to dislike. For the same reason, though not without hesitation and self-abasement, he has begun to teach the little lads again in the Sunday School. Some may call the motive a wrong one, but perhaps the "Inasmuch" will avail for him.

What of the padre ? It was a long, stern battle, and I am not yet sure that it has ended in his favour, for the old man walks with feeble step, and bronchitis has joined in the siege of his weakening defences. But if "pulling" can keep a man from going down to the Gates of Death the padre will not leave us yet. How the people love him ! Yet only two years ago he was a stranger in their midst.

Widow Thorn has shuffled off this mortal coil and rests—let us hope—in the churchyard of her native place ; and Jane, clad in decent black, reigns alone in Eden for the present. For the present ; because report says that another is willing to share with her the responsibilities of government and the savings of the widow, and Jane seems favourably disposed.

Tom Bird is in the workhouse infirmary. The silly fellow tried to save a field-mouse, that had got on to the highway, from the wheels of a motor-car, and succeeded—with bad results to himself. I have been to see him, and his only excuse is that the little thing "'appen 'ad some young uns at 'ome that could ill

spare it." He was not at all penitent, especially as one of the nurses had read to him Burns's poem, and so confirmed his opinion of the value and dignity of mice. The nurses have all lost their hearts to him, and he is getting better quickly and will soon be about again.

The porter calls Tom "a regular nuisance" and complains that women and children from far and near give him no peace. They call with gifts of flowers, and inquire anxiously as to the invalid's condition. Tom Bird must have wrought better than he knew.

I might mention others, but I must forbear. It is good to drink of the stream of life though the waters are sometimes bitter: it is good to sail out into the deep, though it is not always pleasant sailing.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### IN WHICH I DEFY THE MUMMY

**W**AS it not the restless activity of Mr. Darwin that provoked his wife to express the wish that he would either smoke or ruminate like a cow? In these days I am restless enough, and I cannot fly to tobacco for relief, but fortunately the gift of ruminating like a cow has not been denied me. The cow has one advantage over me, however. It chews its cud with a placidity which nothing appears to disturb, whereas I am the victim of conflicting emotions that sometimes play upon my soul like the sweet-scented zephyrs of spring, and at other times goad me to madness and despair.

On this still summer evening I recall the story of that fabled city which lies submerged beneath the waves that lap the lonely shores of Brittany. On some such night they say you may hear the music of the Cathedral bells, like some faint, delicious echo that lingers on the air.

With just such lingering sweetness thoughts that I welcome yet partly fear vibrate upon my brain and fill my breast with melody. Would that I could keep them there! Would that I could thrust back the storm that follows, when the waves rise high and threaten to engulf me, and the bells clang and clash—loud-voiced, ominous.

I have seen much of Doris lately. We have been together on the moors; in the woods and fields—anywhere a hundred yards away from the white high-road. Sometimes mother has been with us: once, Mrs. Stafford; more often the Little Chap. The fragrance of these memories is sweet; but when I think of the occasions when we were alone——!

I wonder what the feelings of a butterfly would be like, if after it had shaken off its chrysalis shell and fluttered with ever-growing boldness into the sunlight, it should find its progress checked by a cord it could not break, and realise that it was still tethered to its shroud.

There is a semblance of liberty that is mockery. Do I not know it? There have been times when I have kicked against restraint: when I have gnawed the cord that held me and almost made up my mind to cast discretion to the winds. I am a man, with a man's heart. The blood that courses through my veins is hot as other men's now. I have arisen and shaken myself; and I will not be treated as if I had man's form but not his feelings—yet that is how everybody treats me.

Everybody? Yes, I do not even except Doris—nay, is she not the chief offender? Her every action makes me conscious that she knows the cord is there and is trusting to its strength; but yesterday I let her see that I was no pet butterfly, to be tortured and fettered by silken threads—that I was not content to accept the devotion of a sister or superior nurse—I tugged at the cord and it yielded a little before her eyes; and the sight of her confusion was as the music of the hidden bells.

We were talking together—talking about nothing,

as we often do. It was hot, and we were sitting on the river bank a few miles from home, watching the brown waters of swift Wharfe as it rippled by, and enjoying the sense of coolness. Her hat was on the grass at her side and her hands were clasped before her. Very charming she looked in her dress of flimsy white, which only half concealed the faint pink flush of arms and throat. A single crimson rose was in her belt ; a smile played at the corners of her lips ; in her eyes was the sparkle of abounding life.

Not a soul was in sight and a reckless mood came over me.

"Doris," I said suddenly ; "were you ever in love ?"

I was stretched full length upon the grass. My head was in my hands and I turned my eyes boldly upon hers as I blurted out the question.

The unexpectedness of it startled her, and her face burned crimson as the rose at her waist. I was glad—humanly, savagely glad, for I felt myself a man, and knew that I had scared the sister and the nurse away as no mummy could have done. She did not reply, but picked up her hat and began to push daisies down the ribbon that encircled it ; and I waited.

The silence and my steady gaze embarrassed her. She did not raise her eyes, and when she replied it was to say in a low and tremulous voice :

"I—I—— Why do you ask ? Were you ?" Then as the words escaped her she remembered. The crimson deepened on her brow and she said hurriedly, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I—I forgot."

I laughed, and there was bitterness in the laugh and in my voice as I replied :

"Yes, you forgot. A fine lover I should make !



A new sort of Don Juan, with one eye on the girl and the other on the 'A' mixture in case of accidents. *I cannot forget."*

It was rather paltry, but it caused me to continue in earnest what I had begun in play. My misery gripped hold of me. I rolled over and sat a little way from her, my arms clasping my knees, darkness on my face and on my spirits. I did not look at her as I unburdened my heart of much of its load.

I am half ashamed of myself now, and yet half glad that I opened out my complaints. It was all true. Of what use to me—of what use to anyone else, was such an existence as mine? Was I not a man—how should I be content to go through life as a child, holding Irving's hand, with the "A" mixture in my satchel?

I spoke hotly, perhaps even eloquently in the plain dictionary sense, and though I turned my head away I felt that Doris was watching and pitying me, and I did not want her pity—the thought of it maddened me.

At last I turned and looked at her. She was very white. The sparkle had left her eyes and the tenderness that now dwelt there calmed my storm. She must have seen it, for a little of the brightness returned as she looked up shyly and began to speak. She was startled and nervous still, but self-composure was returning, and the note of mischief had crept into her voice.

"But I thought you were going to be master of yourself. I thought you had taken control long ago. Why bother about Dr. Irving? If you very much want to get another heart to help out your own why don't you go and look for one?"

I had to hold myself in then, but I managed to reply with comparative calmness :

“ Because at every bend in the road there is a Notice Board that warns me against trespassing. I *am* master of myself, God only knows at what cost ; but I am the slave of circumstance.”

“ Then run away and be free,” she said, fixing her eyes again upon her hat ; “ and take no notice of the boards. Are you sure they are there ? ”

It was then that I tugged hard at the cord. It yielded a little but it did not break, and the golden moment—if it were indeed golden—passed, and it was then too late. Doris sighed and rose, and we went down the path together and Sandy drove us home.

Her picture never leaves my eyes, yet I cannot paint it. I read over the words I have written and know them to be cold and lifeless. But how should I hope to succeed where the greatest of earth's lovers failed ? You may wander with Dante through hell and it is all so real that the stench and horror of it affect your dreams ; but when the terrestrial Paradise is reached, whose pulse quickens by a single beat when Beatrice removes her veil ? Dante's did ; but the wealth of his mother tongue was inadequate to the expression of his thoughts.

What do I care if I cannot set down the charms of *my* Beatrice, for love of whom I am even now treading the painful circles of hell—with how little hope of compensation in heaven ! And there are no waters of Lethe for me.

## CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH THE STORM BREAKS AND THE AIR IS CLEARED

**T**HE air is heavy to-day and dense thunder-clouds are gathering over the moors. There is no breeze even on the heights, and though my windows are flung wide open and I am sitting with my arm upon the sill it seems to require a conscious effort to breathe.

It has been a trying month, this month of August, though it may not have been altogether the fault of the weather that my spirits have been heavier than the air, for there has been a storm within my soul which has not yet spent itself—indeed I am not sure that it has really broken, and until it does I shall know no peace. To-day compulsion is upon me. I must write and without restraint no matter if the flood-gates are raised; no matter if the abyss is opened into which I must fall. I have reached the limit of my endurance. I am reckless now, for I feel that I have plumbed the depths of human bitterness.

I know, of course, how these words would sound to others. I can see clearly enough the smile of the kindly-disposed or the sneer of the cynical, but these things do not move me. I am indifferent to both pity and contempt, for do I not pity and despise myself and is there any ingredient in the cup of life's experiences more bitter than that?



Despite the approaching storm the sun is shining. Away to my right the valley sleeps in golden light. A slight haze softens the outlines of the hills, but it does not obscure the details of a peaceful scene. There are cattle in the pastures beneath the sheltering trees. A field of ripening corn splashes the grey distance with gold. Across the viaduct a train winds slowly and the white smoke from the engine hangs like a filmy cloud above the river. It is very beautiful, but the storm is creeping up and soon the quiet glory will be gone and the landscape will be covered as with a funeral pall.

It is a parable. For twelve months I have lived in the sunlight, drinking it in like the flowers with no thought for the morrow, knowing nothing of foreboding or care. I have dreamed like a fool that life was all sunshine, all summer-time, and now the winter of my discontent is upon me and the storm will sweep me from my feet.

Bah ! I am pitying myself again and soon I shall become hateful in my own eyes. Yet let me indulge myself this once for I can tear out the leaves of a book if I cannot erase the records of the mind, and it may ease me to write—to let the gall (appropriate word) go free.

I am determined to conceal nothing to-day. I will take the blinkers from the eyes of my soul and see. As I lay upon my bed last night—not tossing upon my pillows, for the habit of years is strong upon me—I made up my mind that I would have it out with myself to-day, and my resolution has not weakened. Oh, Doris ! Doris ! You may never have to know it ; I may never hope to tell you, but I will tell myself at least that I love you, I love you ! With all the

strength of my nature, in all purity and sincerity, I love you ; and if my heart must hold its secret from you and expand with love until it break I will no longer deceive myself.

Ah ! the storm at last. That flash was forked, and how the thunder crashes over the hills ! There are people who will be afraid and hide themselves, but I greet the storm as a comrade—as a friend.

I say I will no longer deceive myself, for I *have* deceived myself. Yet was it altogether my fault ? I say it is Irving who is to blame. What right had he to do this ! I was inexperienced ; what right had he to conduct me to the banquet when he knew that the cup would be snatched from my lips ? Was I not contented and happy when he found me ? Did I ask to have my feet set upon the highway of life ? It was cruel to take the cripple from his sheltered nook in the garden and set him where the hoofs of pitiless Fate could trample him into the dust. I was a mummy then ; why did he stretch himself upon me and breathe into my nostrils the breath of a new existence ?

The lightning blinds me, but I will not close my window for I am bathed in perspiration and what greater harm can come to me than heaven has sent already ? The thunder reverberating in the valley is not to be compared with the turmoil in my soul. Flash succeeds flash, and but for a tiny patch of blue beyond the Nunnery the sky is overcast. Soon that will be gone and the blackness will have conquered.

I saw her yesterday. We had driven to the moors and were walking there. She loves the moors as I do. They speak to her and she understands and interprets them, and we tell each other the messages they have

confided to us. Sandy was out of sight just round the bend in the road, smoking his pipe, no doubt, and content to wait our time ; and we were happy. How could we be happy ? At any rate how could I be happy ? How dare I ? A hawk pursued a smaller bird and struck it. Doris grasped my arm and shuddered, and I pressed her hand and found no words to speak. Was not I a hawk who had struck the gentle bird that was dearer to me than life ? So we walked on silently and returned to the carriage, and I felt her heart-beats in my arm, and they were in unison with my own, and I knew that I loved her—purely, passionately, as a man should love the woman he would make his wife.

Ah ! here comes the rain at last, tropical in its violence. The storm centre is directly above us : the flash and the peal are close-linked and awful. It must be that that makes my hand shake as I write. But I am not disturbed. Already the air is cooler and there is a puff of wind among the leaves.

Where was I ? I was happy then ; recklessly, illogically happy ; happier still when we said *Good-night* at the gate and she looked almost shyly into my eyes, then dropped her own.

Pshaw ! What am I saying ? That was my fancy. That was the fool's paradise which I made for myself. I will not believe that she loves me in that way. I dare not. It would be a wicked mockery. Doris is a loyal friend and chum, but she has not lost her heart to me. Fool that I was to deceive myself ! Worse than fool if I have encouraged her to love me !

How dark it is ! I cannot see the lines upon the paper, but what does it matter if crooked words record my crooked luck ? The blue sky has gone : the rain



is flooding the roadway, down which the waters sweep like a torrent. Soon the heavens will be clear. Already the air smells sweet and cool.

If I were a woman I might find relief in tears, but these are denied me. The fountain is dry, and the well-springs of such life as remains for me are poisoned and bitter.

Why did God make me, or having permitted me to be made, why did He lengthen my life? This thing that I call life is counterfeit. He has given me the capacity to love and withholds love's fulfilment. It had been better for me if I had never been born. And yet, no, I withdraw that, for then I should not have known Doris. Oh, Doris! Doris! I love you and I want you for my own. Why should I not be allowed to win your love? Why should the happiness that comes to others be refused to me? I want to gain your heart, to clasp you in my arms, to possess you for ever! Life is not life without love! I yearn for you, Doris!

What am I writing? It has relieved me, but I know how futile it is. Am I not worse than crippled? Are there not a hundred obstacles to our union? I love her too well to let her know my love. I will not bring the tiniest cloud across her peace. I will master myself in her presence; I will smile and laugh when my heart is breaking. I will go down to the grave mourning for a love that will not die. Who was it said he would "go down to the grave mourning"? My head is dazed, yet I think it was Jacob, and Jacob served seven years for Rachel. Oh, Doris, my loved one! how gladly would I serve seven years for you, and they should seem to me but a few days for the love I have to you! It was cruel to make me thus; it was doubly

cruel to open my blind eyes to see the paradise I may not enter. I do well to be angry : I do well, I say.

There is only a distant rumble now. The clouds hang low over the Nunnery but a clear white light is on the moors in the west. The rain has stopped but there is a heavy drip from the trees, and the spouts below the eaves are choked and overflowing. I breathe more easily, but my head aches frightfully.

Well, I must try to kiss the rod, and learn once more the lesson of resignation. It is not so easy to learn when one is old, and I feel very old again to-day. I am calmer, however, and the outburst has done me good. It has not changed my feelings towards Doris—oh, my darling, you are enthroned all too surely in my heart!—but it has clarified my vision. I know now what is before me. God has dealt hardly by me—or Irving, or both—but I must dree my weird as best I can.

The sun is out again and every tree glistens with diamonds. From the meadow in front of me a lark soars trilling into the blue.

## CHAPTER XXX

### IN WHICH PIMPLE SECURES A DOUBLE PROMOTION

I HAVE been so moody and out of sorts recently that I had almost persuaded myself that I was weary of writing, and I certainly had no patience to record my own trivial concerns. I think Saul must have been under the influence of a similar mood when that evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, though I am pretty sure a modern chronicler would not trace back my ill-humour to the same source. I believe, however, if any man had tried to soothe me with music I should have wanted to throw something at him; there are times when it makes one cross to see other people so even-tempered that they can settle down to "concord of sweet sounds."

Some impulse sent me a few minutes ago to *Ecclesiastes*, which I opened, as it chanced, at the last chapter. I read it and felt worse than ever, so put the book away and sat down to think about it. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the evil spirit did the thinking and did it aloud for my benefit. It was on these lines. "What is the use of writing down your uneventful history when there is such history in the making as the world has never known! Why should you set in order the proverbs and performances of a simple people and seek to find out acceptable words, even though they be words of truth, when the



daughters of music have been brought low and the mourners are going about the streets ! ”

Why indeed ! Yet just to mark some improvement on the Hebrew king I threw my javelin at the evil spirit by reaching down my Memoirs and unsheathing my fountain-pen, and it must have struck home, for even before I began to write my better spirits rose. I am no use whatever at a sword, but if the pen is really a mightier weapon, I may make these pages into a drill ground and get some practice in that kind of warfare.

If I had only continued my biography at the time I could have written much of the quiet delights of July. I might have wooed the sunshine to these pages and perfumed them with the sweetness of the summer air as it lingered over the moorland, but I cannot now. That is a dream, beautiful and to be treasured, but away in the background of memory, carried there by sterner and greyer events that have swept over us like a cataclysm.

Yes, they were bright days, and on one of the brightest of them Miss Janet fluttered to the altar at the Parish Church, and Mr. Francis took her away for a month of honeymooning.

I tried to rejoice with those who rejoiced and succeeded indifferently, and until the shadow of war fell over us in the closing days of the month there was nothing else to record except the outburst of the last few pages.

We are a quiet, law-abiding people in Netherleigh ; a people who have a conservative reverence for the things to which we have always been accustomed, and we are not to be lightly shaken from our belief in the stability of the world. We wrangle over politics

and religion like everybody else, but with the comfortable assurance that the business of life and its pleasures will go on pretty much the same whatever ministers of state are at the head of our affairs, and whatever bickerings there may be between Church and Dissent. We had heard of wars and rumours of wars before, but our diplomats and statesmen had managed very well without our assistance, and we left the present weighty business to them with unruffled minds, and went on with our machine-making and the like.

It was only when Pimple came up to my room on the evening of that first Sunday in August that I began to realise not only what might be, but how very close the war would come to us if come it should.

It was a new Pimple who stood before me that night. He was in his neat Sunday clothes, and he had been to the service at the chapel, but it was not the joiner nor the Sunday School teacher whom I looked upon then, but the soldier. There was no mistaking it. He held himself erect as on parade. He was only a private but he felt the war in his bones, as some men feel a change in the weather there, and he was eager to be off.

"I shall be called up in a day or two, sir, as sure as we're living," he said; "an' I'm getting everything in order so as I can leave wi' a' easy mind."

I would not believe it, and tried to laugh him into another mood, but failed. He had come to say good-bye and he said it. I cannot of course regard it now as I did then, but I recall how ridiculous and theatrical it seemed when he said with business-like composure:

"If I fall, sir, there's my bit o' savings i' the Bank an' what my tools 'll fetch, an' I should like 'Arriet to 'ave 'em, an' I'll take the liberty, if you'll let me,

o' sending my books an' papers up to you. But my watch 'll be no use to me over there an' I'd like yon little lad to 'ave it, an' my Bible an' all. I'll come back again, please God, but if not you'll not find it too much trouble, 'appen, to do these little jobs for me? "

I consented, of course, wondering what sort of a fool he would feel like when the clouds should have blown over in a week's time, yet I shook hands with him and wished him God-speed.

He went away three days later and Harriet's eyes were red when she brought me the news, though she bore up bravely and was ashamed that she had not cloaked her feelings. Her face gave her away and she knew it.

"I shouldn't ha' cried," she apologised, "if it 'adn't ha' been for 'Melia. She turns t' water tap on somethin' cruel. If 'er young man chances to 'list ther'll be nought left of 'er but what'll go i' a bucket. She makes me mad, does 'Melia, carryin' on like that. Pimple isn't 'er young man."

"Neither is he yours," I reminded her; "perhaps after the war you'll promote him to that rank."

"I promoted 'im o' Sunday," she replied simply, and despite her efforts at self-control a tear stole out of her eye, and she brushed it away impatiently with her sleeve. "I'm goin' soft," she said. "I were as right as t' mail till 'Melia set me off, silly thing!"

I spoke what words of cheer occurred to me, and just before she left the room she said with some hesitation:

"Miss Trichud, I'm none goin' to go on frettin' about Pimple. 'E's told me all about t' war an' what we're fightin' for, an' if Pimple says it's right it is right. It's 'is duty to go, an' I wouldn't lift my little



finger to keep 'im back. Ec, I only wish I could ha' gone wi' 'im, an' I would ha' done if I'd been a man. It's first time I ever wanted to be. But that wasn't what I was goin' to say. Pimple says there'll be thousands of 'em killed, an' they 'ave to be willin' to be killed, same as 'e is, an' I wouldn't ha' 'ad 'im for a young man if 'e 'adn't ha' been. But do you think there'd be aught wrong i' puttin' up a bit of a prayer now an' then 'at 'e should come back all right if it could be managed? "

I told her I saw no harm in making the experiment and Harriet brightened.

" Well, if I was to cry while it came over wer boot tops," she said, with her hand on the door, " it 'ud make things no better, would it? Gettin' damp feet wouldn't cure t' 'eart-ache; an' if all t' women 'at's sendin' their lads was to carry on i' that fashion we should 'ave t' country under water."

It was only during the night when sleep refused to visit me that I thought of the Staffords and my heart ached for them. I went round the next morning but found that friends were staying there for a few days so I did not go in; and it was a week later before I saw Mrs. Stafford.

Doris had called, and we went in together, for the two girls had struck up a friendship, much to my satisfaction. The Little Chap greeted us boisterously and showed us the toy soldiers and cannon which had temporarily supplanted trains in his affections; but his mother shuddered perceptibly as he told of the gallant deeds his soldiers had done; and her face was very white and her eyes showed signs of sleeplessness.

She strove her hardest to be calm, and when I asked about her husband, for I thought it best not to beat

about the bush, she told us without emotion that he was ordered back from Egypt, and was certain to go to the front.

"He will have a day or two with us," she said, a faint smile hovering about her lips, "and we shall be glad to see him and wish him good luck and promotion, shan't we, sonnie?" and she picked up the kiddie and kissed him with a vehemence that told its own tale.

The Little Chap submitted to the caress without protest, but he was obviously glad to be set down again, when he could proceed with the recital of the incredibly valorous deeds of that section of the British Army which it was his privilege to marshal. One resplendent figure in a cocked hat with plumes represented his daddy, and this hero rode again and again into the massed ranks of the enemy, who were overthrown on every occasion. I remember hoping, as I looked on and applauded, that the kiddie might indeed be inspired with the prophetic gift.

It was well into September before Stafford arrived. He was just as bright and boisterous as before—more so, I think, because he had to exaggerate sometimes for his wife's sake—and he did not conceal his delight at the prospect of active service.

Just before he left home he came bounding up the stairs into my room. I was not fully dressed, indeed I was about half through the process of shaving, but that troubled neither of us.

"I say, old chap," he said; "I've only five minutes, so hurry up with that lather brush."

I hurried up and he chatted gaily all the time. Then he seized my hand and squeezed it until I nearly stood on one foot.

"Good luck to you! Give my love to Doris. By Jove, she's a stunner; second only to the one I've got. If I were you I'd offer her my heart and I bet she'd take it and mend it. I hope to be at your wedding yet, but that's as God wills."

His face softened and he looked steadily into my eyes. "Dallinger, it's a tough job we've taken on this time, and I shall be in the thick of it if they'll let me, and I may go under. If I do you'll not forget what I said to you about the kid, will you? And you'll keep an eye on the wife, poor old girl—she thinks a lot of you. I leave them to you and Doris. God bless you, old chap."

He whistled like a schoolboy as he went down the steps, and I began to think that I was getting more than my share of legacies.

News has just come that Pimple has been made a sergeant.



## CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH THE DOCTOR PROVIDES AN EMETIC AND  
FOLLOWS IT WITH A TONIC

I USED to make it a rule in the old days that the weather was not to be allowed to affect my spirits. At that time it was easy both to make rules and to keep them—it requires no effort on a man's part to keep to the right when he is walking between high walls on a footpath so narrow that "single file" is a necessity; and the rules for the private use of mummies can be easily remembered.

But it is another thing when you are in command of a ship. Then, thick heavy weather of the sort we have just been having hinders progress and makes the inexperienced captain nervy. There is no doubt that I was inexperienced, and though the patched-up derelict of a *Santa Maria* has done wonderfully well for those who commissioned it—a gloss for Irving—there have been times when I have sat in the cabin nursing very dark thoughts about the unhappy fate of its master.

This Columbus fancy rather pleased me a few months ago, but it has its limitations, as I have discovered. What would be thought of those who rigged up a ship, and *such* a ship, and put it in charge of one who had never seen the sea, and bade him sail out into the Unknown and find the treasures that it held? What

could be expected of any such mad enterprise but disaster ?

That is what Irving did for me—launched me upon the sea of material adventure and forgot that somewhere inside the mummy's wrappings lay the heart of a man ; and that as the wrappings rotted and fell away and the fresh breezes of heaven began to be felt, the dry bones would live, and the heart burst its bands and become human and emotional.

The situation was fast becoming intolerable, and several times I was on the point of confiding in dad, but something—nervousness or shamefacedness, perhaps—restrained me. Dad is practical and would have understood, for he never looks upon men as plaster saints nor upon girls as Madonnas. I might have discussed the matter with him eventually, for I was growing desperate, and felt that I must share my secret with somebody ; but chance ordered that it should be with Irving.

He called one evening when I was in my attic and in one of my darkest moods, and my cordiality was not marked. For some time the silence was oppressive, and if I had not been unusually ill-tempered I should have seen myself and been ashamed, but my moroseness blinded me. Irving's presence was unwelcome, and I wanted him to realise it.

He was obtuse, however. Having come to spend the evening he was evidently determined to spend it all.

He tried me on every possible topic, but I was monosyllabic, and I pointed and underlined my monosyllables without in any way disturbing his composure. That irritated me, and when at last he succumbed I was pleased. He uncrossed his legs and rose. " You

had better get to bed," he said. "Just what is the matter with you I can't say, but——"

He paused and looked into my eyes. "What ails you?" he continued. His tone lost its airiness and became professional, and he reached out his hand towards my wrist, whereupon I drew my arm away, and he sat down again.

I had to yield, and his fingers closed upon my pulse. "Even the blues have a cause," he remarked. "Sometimes we can discover it and sometimes we cannot. There's nothing much the matter with your works, anyhow."

I said nothing, but continued to frown. Then a smile spread across his face—the smile I used to like so much. "What is a 'gib cat'?" he asked.

This was trifling with my feelings, and I surlily answered "Why?"

"I've seen the expression somewhere," he replied—" '*melancholy as a gib cat.*' I wondered what sort of an animal it was, and if I were ever likely to come across a specimen."

I knew what a gib cat was, but it was information that was not essential to a medical man's knowledge, so I withheld it. After an awkward pause he continued.

"I can't get at your mind unless you unlock it, or unless I break in, which I have no intention of doing. What's up?"

That direct question drew me. "Everything's up," I replied. "The whole game's up!"

He raised his eyebrows. "Suppose you condescend to details. What is the particular game that is up and that has taken everything up with it?"

He spoke kindly, encouragingly, and to prove him-



self a spendthrift of leisure, reached over and took another cigar. I wished Providence would make somebody ill for my relief, but the wish was not realised. I tried harder than ever to make my face say that I was not at home to visitors, but it evidently mumbled the message, for the doctor leaned back in his chair, crossed his legs again, and gave himself up to enjoyment. He refused to notice that I had not lowered the drawbridge at his summons, and continued after a while with no regard to his metaphors :

“ Perhaps the Autobiography would throw some light upon the situation. It’s quite a long time since I drank of that refreshing stream. May we have the fountain unsealed ? ”

I defy anybody to deny that this was provoking, and I replied acidly, “ We may not. I’m tired of being a pump-room, and the waters, I may add, have turned bitter, even poisonous, and are not now on tap.”

At that moment I tried to persuade myself that I hated the man. His sprightly manner not only jarred upon me but stirred my resentment. I was ready to consider myself insulted though now I know that I was peevish. I meant to be cool and lofty as I replied :

“ I may as well be plain with you, doctor. I’m not going to show you the book, but I feel desperately inclined to relieve my mind of what has been burdening it for some time, and if I do I may hurt your feelings and say something I shall afterwards regret.”

“ Let us both risk it,” he replied, and with such placidity that I lost inward control ; “ if you’ve a weight of that kind on your mind the sooner you get rid of it the better. I seem to provoke you to-night, but that’s the mission of an emetic——”

I interrupted him. I thought I was heroic, but I

was probably pretty much a fool as I tightened my lips and my resolution and said :

“ Very well ; then I will tell you that I’m in hell and you sent me there. Are your eyes so dull that you cannot see or are you so stony-hearted that you do not care ? You sit there smiling cynically (this was untrue, for his eyes were bent upon me quite seriously) whilst I am in misery that grows less bearable every day. You know what is the matter with me. You know the curse your prescription has brought upon me, and perhaps upon Doris. I say you know well enough that I love her, and it is nothing to you. You are proof against this poison, and can afford to laugh at an agony you have never experienced.”

We were looking into each other’s eyes, and I am afraid to think what sort of spectacle I made. My words stung him a little, I imagine, for there was the faintest trace of sarcasm in his reply :

“ You are hardly just to me. I warned you faithfully at the very beginning of this romance, and I am much mistaken if *you* did not do the laughing then. I suggested the erection of a board ; is it fair to blame me now that the trespasser has got in and the damage has been done ? ”

I was in no mood for thrust and parry, for stroke and counter-stroke, and I told him so. All I felt was the weight of my misery, and the burden which I could not help feeling that Doris might have to carry. I was utterly and hopelessly wretched, and if I was unjust I was at any rate sincere. I unburdened my mind wholeheartedly, but the pressure was not relieved.

“ I’ve looked for this,” he said when I had exhausted myself. His head was well back on the chair, and he paused to blow the smoke away from his nostrils.

Then he smiled and turned towards me, and my exasperation increased. "Do you know, I came on purpose for this to-night. You're the most curious case, all things considered, I've ever had, and I wouldn't have missed you for a year's income. I've watched you and your experiment in living with growing interest, and I've read your jottings with real pleasure. I'm glad you've opened your heart to me; now let me read what you have written. I will keep it sacred, believe me."

I jumped to my feet then. I admit I misunderstood him, but even now I think it was his own fault; even now I think he asked for the tornado of hard words I hurled at him. But I got the book and gave it to him. "You have asked to see my Memoirs," I said, "and you shall see them. You shall read what I wrote in an hour of sore trouble, and if you can still smile and be 'interested,' forsooth, I have no further use for you. Read them, and I will then tear them out and destroy them, and you shall watch me do it, and if you can continue to jeer I wish you joy of your feelings."

I turned my back upon him whilst he read, and my face flushed with shame, but I returned to my chair at his request when he closed the book.

He threw the stump of his cigar away, and there was no smile in his eyes, but rather a veil of tenderness—even of sadness—as he spoke.

"My dear fellow, when this thing began I was worried. You have not said to me to-night one half of what I was prepared to say to myself. I was not blind, I saw only too clearly what was likely to happen, and it bothered me. But what could I do? I had not foreseen this contingency at the outset, and I



do not think I am to blame. When I did see a likelihood of mischief I tried to stop it, but I couldn't. Love is a growth which surgeons cannot remove, and I could only warn you."

I melted a little, for Irving's voice and manner soothed me now, and somehow—I don't at all know why—I began to pity him. He spoke like one who had himself known heavy sorrows.

"All the same," he continued, "I would have attempted the impossible if only to relieve my own feelings, and I would at least have continued to shout my warnings and to make them more peremptory if one consideration had not restrained me. I believed it possible that you might marry. No, do not interrupt me and do not excite yourself, for I shall make my meaning plain, and I am speaking professionally. I was led to hope, and by degrees to believe, that my prescription was going to be justified; that this peculiar heart of yours was going to become less peculiar. I watched you carefully and I found that exertion was doing you good. By and by I reached the conclusion that you would be able to enjoy a much fuller life than you could have ever hoped for. I will not enter into details to-night, but I want to tell you, and I came to tell you, that though you will always have to take care of yourself, there is no reason why you should not take care of somebody else too. Let me put it in this way—if this improvement is maintained and continued, as I honestly believe it will be, I have no hesitation in saying that in twelve months' time you might marry without undue risk. Get further advice if you like, but that is my firm opinion."

He stopped, and so did my heart. Then it bounded

and I gripped the chair. Irving rose, and selecting a bottle from the array upon the washstand, poured some of the mixture into a glass and made me drink it.

I was all right in a minute or two, and burst out with questions and apologies all jumbled together. He stopped me, however, and the authority in his voice calmed my spirits. "You must listen now," he said, "and let me speak. You have said enough for one day, and I have said nearly enough."

He spoke for quite a long time, however, and anticipated all my objections. When he left I sent my supper away untasted, except that I swallowed a glass of milk to prevent uneasiness and explanations, and I went to bed and fed on ambrosia. When I had sated myself the serpent entered and I fell asleep to dream that paradise was only a wilderness after all, for Eve had declined to enter it.

The impression of the dream remains. What fools we are—at any rate, some of us! Why in the world should Doris, or any other girl who is sane, be willing to marry a patched-up man like me! It seemed possible only when it was impossible.

## CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH I CONCEIVE THE HOPE THAT THE LITTLE  
CHAP IS AN INSPIRED PROPHET

I CAN understand, I think, how it was that certain people in ancient times used to worship the sun. It was the most majestic phenomenon they knew and the most beneficent. It warmed and fed them, and was Father Bountiful in the most exemplary and impartial way ; and the only men who loved darkness rather than light were those who robbed Assyrian hen-roosts and the like when the sun-god's chariot had disappeared beyond the hills.

My heart has gone out to the sun these last few days, not as to a god exactly, but as to a highly-placed sympathiser who is willing to do a friend a good turn. Here we are in October, and he is shining as brightly as he can day after day in order that no obstacle may be placed in the way of my daily excursions, and filling every corner of my heart with light and warmth.

Under his genial influence, depression has taken to itself wings and flown away. The wings began to grow a week ago after my conversation with the doctor, and though modesty and logic put some half-hearted hindrances in the way of their development, it was an ineffective effort to fight against nature. My hopes and my spirits rose daily, and every joy-bell



in my heart was ringing when the pony without guidance—at any rate, of an earthly kind—turned on to the Overburn road on the sunniest day of this sunny week. They were not ringing their loudest, of course, because this was not “THE DAY,” but only an anticipation of it, but they were wonderfully sweet and tuneful, and as a sort of dress rehearsal the peal was quite a success.

My mind was full of the doctor’s words, but I had no intention of liberating them that day, and when the Little Chap called Doris “aunty” I almost lost my breath. He did it quite of his own accord, let me add, and my hopes were strengthened. Since the padre’s vision I look upon what we call coincidences with much respect, and I regard the kiddie’s utterance as inspired prophecy.

It did not seem to worry Doris, and if she suspected anything in the way of previous prompting, she kept her suspicions to herself. As for me I made up my mind on the spot to take the Little Chap with me regularly, in spite of the accepted opinion about three in company. He is an asset, as later events also proved.

Since that memorable day when I defied the mummy on the river bank, Doris has not been quite the same girl. I venture the assertion that if the truth were known she has always that Notice Board before her eyes now, and remembers that she recommended me to pull it down. Or if she did not exactly do that it comes to pretty much the same thing. As long as I was a mummy she did not hesitate to come near and dust me, so to speak, but now that she finds I am a man she has begun to treat me as if I were something that might explode at any minute, so she handles me more carefully and does not sit quite so close. All

of which is rather exciting, as it enables me to do the handling and to regulate the distances.

Of course she could turn me round her little finger, or lead me by the nose, or demonstrate in any other proverbial way that I am her abject slave, only she is not aware of it. One of these days I shall tell her.

We sat in the garden and the kiddie went to sleep with his head in her lap—I have always said he was a considerate little chap. That meant that we had not to speak loudly lest we should wake him, and I thought it necessary for us to sit very near together so that we might converse in whispers. Doris wanted me to go and talk to the padre, but I had an impression amounting to a conviction that he was resting and ought not to be disturbed; and the arch look which challenged my sincerity exhilarated me.

“Isn’t he a perfect little darling?” she asked, turning her eyes on to the kiddie. “Look how his dear little lips are pursed up for the angels to kiss.”

“But you might wake him,” I suggested, and was answered with a look that was perhaps meant for reproof.

“I wonder what that tiny red spot is above his eye,” whispered Doris, “have you noticed it?”

To see it I was forced to bend over, and as Doris was bending too, our heads touched. It was inevitable, and there was no reason in the world why she should have drawn hers away with such suddenness as she did, unless it was the fear to which I have referred that I might “go off.”

“Now you’ve wakened him,” she said reproachfully; but I leave it to any unbiased mind to say if the fault were mine.

We had tea early because my friend the sun, how-



ever well disposed, is compelled to retire early as winter draws on, and we have to consider his arrangements. When Sandy drove up Doris walked down with us to the gate. There was no need to hurry, and I daresay the parting was prolonged, though the conversation was not important enough to be recorded. I had almost forgotten the Little Chap's existence until I happened to glance down and saw his grave eyes fixed inquiringly upon Doris. She saw them, too, and said, "What is it, darling?"

"Aunty," he inquired, "do you love Uncle Onry very much?"

"Why, of course," she replied, without a moment's hesitation, "don't you?"

I did not dare to look at her. I stole a look at Sandy, but Sandy was looking at the pony.

I went home in high spirits. From the topmast of my vessel I thought I could discern the faint outline of a New World. But there were rough waters ahead, and I sobered down as I thought about them. From day to day I had put off the task of breaking to mother and dad the news of Irving's pronouncement. More than once I had made a start, but my courage always failed me, and the ingenuity I displayed in turning the conversation on to aircraft or sweet-pea culture annoyed far more than it pleased me.

As I was now a man, however, I determined not to be a coward, and on Sunday afternoon I followed them into the conservatory and told them the whole story. I pointed out that from that hour I cast the ceremonies of the mummy aside in favour of the emotions of the man.

Mother appeared to yield up my bad heart with reluctance, and did not regard the possession of Doris's,



which is apparently healthy, as sufficient compensation for the vagaries and eccentricities of my own.

I felt sorry for her because her code of morals forbids fancy work on Sundays, and she was therefore, as dad said, at a loose end. I do not at all know what that means, but it is evidently a disadvantage, and as he was smoking as usual, I suppose he himself was not at a loose end.

There was chill silence when I had finished, and as I glanced from one to the other to take barometrical readings, I saw that dad's face was set fair, and mother's—was not.

Mother wanted dad to open the discussion, but in reply to her "Well, Richard?" he just jerked his head in her direction, and said, "Your turn, my dear. Ladies first, always."

There was again silence, broken only by the rustle of silk as mother felt for her weapon of offence; and I could not help wondering if the want of smoothness along the course of true love might not be due in part to heavy cloud-bursts at the beginning.

When the competition came to an end, and mother proceeded to condemn the situation as ridiculous and undreamed of, dad felt free to speak.

"And now it's a nightmare, eh? Women always have to spill a drop o' water over these jobs, Dick—don't you worry about it. It 'ud have been just the same if you'd been as strong as Samson—there'd have had to be a downfall when Delilah came waltzing round."

Mother regarded the reference as uncomplimentary to both Doris and me, but I honoured dad for his intentions; and though he obligingly offered Isaac and Rebekah, or Paul and Virginia, as substitutes, it was quite unnecessary as far as I was concerned.

When mother is both tearful and dignified I am always ill at ease, but on this occasion there was no need for me to interfere, and dad knows how to deal with these situations. He can turn his opponent's rapier as neatly as most men, I should say.

For instance, when mother refused to have the matter treated with ridicule, and emphasised the assertion that I was not like other boys, what did dad reply ?

"Except that he's sick to have a sweetheart, and, by Jove, I don't blame him. Why, bless my life, where should I have been if I hadn't got one? It was the making of me, that was. If Doris is content to put up with Dick and knows her own mind, it 'ud be a load off mine, I can tell you."

The rocket had been very pretty, and had expanded gracefully, but the fall of the stick startled us both. Dad left us, however, in no doubt of his meaning.

"Yes, a load off mine. You, my dear, think that things will go on as they are for ever; that you and I will flourish like the green bay tree as long as there are any green bays. Well, it's a mistake. One o' these days we shall both be missing numbers, and who'll look after Dick then?"

That silenced mother, and dad proceeded to elaborate and spoil his argument, as he very often does. He knew perfectly well what would happen to me if I were left orphaned and unwed. Some designing house-keeper or trained nurse would pick me up and marry me before I could lift a finger to prevent them; and he would rather his hard-earned money should go to Doris than to somebody from a registry office. I went hot and indignant, and hardly appreciated what he termed "the common-sense way o' sizing things

up " ; but mother appeared to be impressed, though it was in rather a frigid tone that she inquired if, in that case, there was anything more to be said.

" Well, not unless we were to wish the lad good-luck," dad replied.

So I got through the rough weather with nothing worse than a shivering of the vessel's beams in the white squall ; and in the luminous haze ahead I see—I think I see—the land of my dreams—the Happy Isle of Aves.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

IN WHICH LIEUTENANT AND MRS. STAFFORD EACH  
MAKE A GREAT GIFT TO THEIR COUNTRY

**I** HAVE said little about the war, and I wish the present record had not to be made, but I cannot omit it—I must not. I am glad I do not live in one of those big towns where the evening papers are tumbled out into the streets before the newsboys are well awake, and keep on tumbling until everybody ought to be in bed. Of course we in Netherleigh are only a giant's stride from the world's highway, and the Spirit of Rumour often rests in our old town as she flies across the land; but we are a somewhat sluggish folk and we take the war, perhaps, too calmly.

During the first weeks of the war my thoughts turned often to Ephraim. Strangely enough, now that the storm-cloud which he had seen so long upon the horizon had burst over Europe, his troubled soul had found rest. Nothing moved him. One would have said that he was not at all interested in the incidents of the war, yet I am not sure of that, for I satisfied myself that he was quite able to realise a good deal of its import; and though he would listen with closed eyes and no sign of emotion whilst the most exciting details were being read or recounted, he would often close the discussion with a not inapposite quotation from Scripture.

As he grew weaker he became gentler, and the voice and touch of his wife had an almost magical influence upon him. The unearthly pallor of his face, if possible, intensified, but there was a new note of tenderness in his voice as he reiterated the only message that now ever came to his lips: "*A remnant shall return. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*"

"It's like a taste o' Kingdom-come is this, Mester Richard," Mrs. Pegg whispered as she said good-bye to me at the door one day. "I can say 'im like a little 'un, an' 'e's same as 'e's buried all t' flaysome things i' t' Bible out o' sight. I'm sure it's fair grand to 'ave 'im drawin' up fresh water out o' t' well after all these years o' twinin' up boggarts."

So the days passed away and October came in, with all its rich tints of bright red berries and decaying leaves. The birds were still with us in vast numbers; not only our usual winter visitors, but many that usually desert us before now for sunnier climes. The wiseheads among us accounted for it readily enough. Had not the birds heard of the wild happenings across the sea, where the air vibrated with the hiss of shrapnel; where the earth shook as great shells burst upon it; where the trees, torn and dismembered, offered no shelter or halting place for timid migrants; and being wiseheads they were not unnaturally wrong.

I was watching the graceful evolutions of some martins one afternoon, indolently wondering if they were really preparing to depart, when my eye was attracted by a movement at the door of the Stafford's cottage, directly below. Mrs. Stafford was leaving the house with the kiddie, and coming towards ours, and the maid was drying her eyes as she watched them

leave. The significance of it did not strike me at first, and when it did my impulse was to hasten downstairs.

Haste is, of course, forbidden me, but for the moment self was forgotten, and I do not now know whether my rapid pulse was due to unusual exertion or to the influence of an emotional thought.

I had just blurted out my fears to mother when the door opened and Mrs. Stafford entered, holding the Little Chap by the hand. She was very white, but erect, stately, composed.

We had both been standing, and mother moved towards her with arms outstretched. There was something, however, in Mrs. Stafford's manner that checked the movement of sympathy, and there was not even a handshake.

She told us all in a sentence, and her voice was full of sad sweetness. Stafford had been shot through the heart on the evening of his first day of battle.

She laid the telegram upon the table, fingering it a little as if it were something that would respond to a caress. I was shocked and tongue-tied, but mother retained her self-possession, and I was proud of her and of the girl who faced her with such gentle dignity. I have called mother queenly, but indeed they both held themselves as queens that day; and mine were the only eyes that filled with tears.

What mother said I do not remember—I am not even sure that I heard—but I know what reply was made :

“ You are very good to me, and I know how sorry you are. But please don't pity me; promise me you will not let anybody pity me, because I am so proud to be George's wife. You don't blame me for feeling like that, do you? You see, I cannot explain it at all well, but George gave his very best to his country,



and gave it gladly. I am a woman, and I cannot do what he did, but he was my very best, and I give him to my country—gladly.”

I made a fool of myself then, and I record it with shame and self-contempt, and she came up to me, still tightly grasping the Little Chap’s hand, and put her right arm through mine.

“Don’t grieve like that,” she said. “I think they are all heroes, and we must be very proud of them. See! I have brought sonnie to you. He does not understand; but I want you to take him now as you once offered to do ever so long ago when I was young and thoughtless. Take him, and help him to grow up a good, pure Englishman, as his daddie was. I give him in trust to you for his father.”

It was said very simply, with just a little affectionate pressure upon my arm, and I could not recover myself at once, but felt to be a bigger baby than the Little Chap, who gazed at us all the time, open-eyed and solemn, and spoke never a word.

They went out at the back, and as Harriet crossed the hall Mrs. Stafford stopped and told her.

Sweet little woman! She had given her best to her country, and she would not grudge the gift. She asked the padre to conduct a short service at the house, but there was nothing gloomy or funereal about it—there could not be, for the padre’s religion is not of that sort—and if our hearts beat a little more quickly it was because the note of triumph rang out so loudly.

“*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*”—the noble saying of the Italian soldier-poet never grows stale; but One who knew the meaning of sacrifice and was no satirist went further than Horace: “*Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### IN WHICH I DO SOME PROSPECTING IN THE DIRECTION OF EDEN

**I**T is November, and of all the months of the year this surely is the dullest and least romantic. For one thing, it is the month of fogs. It is true that in Netherleigh we are spared the thick and evil species that visit the big centres of population and there mix with the smoke and filth that still further corrupt them ; but though ours are not yellow but only yellowish, and though the taste they leave in the mouth is disagreeable rather than nauseous, still they *are* fogs, and not amongst our most cheerful or welcome visitors.

More often, however, we have a sort of misty rain, scarcely penetrating or thick enough, I fancy, to be called a Scotch mist, and I have no hard words for these rovers, which sweep down the valley in ever-changing forms, no one of which is without beauty.

Just now, for instance, the rain has been falling smartly, yet the vapour was so fine that it was difficult to be sure that it was raining at all. It was only when one looked and looked again that certainty was established. Then the sun climbed up to a narrow slit in the clouds and just peeped through for a minute or so, and it was as though some unseen hand were shaking out the folds of a shawl of filmy lace, spangled

with tiny, flashing diamonds, and casting it carelessly over the shoulders of the grey hills beyond the river.

Dad, who has just rudely looked over my shoulder, designates this as rubbish, and asserts without fear of contradiction that of all the rotten Novembers in his experience this has been the rottenest—"rain, rain, rain, like a beastly waterspout"—to which I can only answer: "He that hath eyes to see let him see."

Dad has no difficulty, however, in furnishing a satisfactory explanation of my enthusiasm for a grey month. "It's as plain as copper-plate," he said; "nothing plainer. You give me hold o' that pen for five minutes and I'll let daylight into November and the cat out o' the bag at the same time. I'll jolly soon show why this dirty month is as bright and gay as a pantomime—jolly soon I will."

I declined the offer on the ground that collaboration in autobiography was undesirable, though I had hardly committed myself to the opinion before I realised that I had spoken with a double tongue, as I shall have to show.

No, I decline to admit that November is as black as it is painted. I have surveyed earth and sky so long from my attic window that I have learned this lesson—it is good to look out upon life from the upper windows of the soul. One gets from that standpoint a better perspective, a purer atmosphere and consequently a clearer vision.

Apart altogether from that I acknowledge that this would have been a good month to me—the very month of months—if each day had been "rotten" enough to offend the senses. The one day of the thirty that will always live in my memory as the best and brightest of them all was in reality, I believe,



judged by common and material standards, particularly unpleasant. Harriet said it was, anyhow.

To be "throng" according to Harriet is to be over head and ears in work. I was "throng" that morning; my table was littered with papers, and books of reference were piled round me, when there came a knock upon the door, and I did not need the sight of the fringe of red hair to tell me who was my interrupter.

"Well?" I said, perhaps a little impatiently.

"Ee, I 'ope I 'aven't broke ye off, Miss Trichud," she gasped, for she was both excited and breathless; "but I just run up to tell ye 'at Miss Doris 'as come, an' she's i' t' breakfast-room wi' t' missus. They didn't tell me to tell ye."

That being the case I judged it expedient to be unmoved. "Thank you, Harriet," I replied. "Do you know if Miss Doris is staying to dinner?"

Harriet started as she heard footsteps on the stairs. "They're comin' up," she said, and darted across into her own bedroom, where I heard her close the door. The ladies, however, went no farther than the lower landing, and Harriet emerged in a few minutes and announced that they had gone downstairs and that Miss Doris had "taken her things off."

"Ee, she were wet," she explained confidentially; "it's teemin' down outside; 'appen she'll 'ave to stop all t' night agen if it goes on i' this way."

She looked across at me hopefully, and when I gave no sign of sympathy she sighed and retired.

I continued my work, listening every moment for a lighter step than Harriet's, and by and by it came.

"May I come in, or are you so *very* busy? Anyhow I've only run up to tell you that I'm not coming—

not until afternoon—and then I'm to make tea for you if you'll let me."

I grumbled at this as I held her hand and looked into the eyes where tenderness and mischief lurked ; and I tried to argue against the arrangement, but unsuccessfully. " You're as bad as the priest that came and looked on the other poor fellow, and then passed by on the other side," I said.

" Wasn't it the Levite who came and looked ? " she retorted.

" It was some heartless creature in skirts, anyway," I replied.

We came up the stairs together in the middle of the afternoon, and she congratulated me on the ease with which I mounted them. I intimated that if I could only arrange for her help regularly I should go up and down oftener, but she was not to be drawn, and replied airily that I should probably find a lift cheaper in the long run.

She had never looked and she had never been more charming than that day. For the past hour or so I had arranged the stage and rehearsed in my mind the scene that was to follow, but now that the curtain was about to rise my brain forgot its part and I was nervous. Doris, on the contrary, was more natural and self-possessed than I had seen her for a long time ; and as she stepped lightly across the room and bent over the papers which I had purposely left upon the table, her grace and shapeliness took away my breath and my courage, and I had to screw myself up pretty considerably.

She brought some of the written sheets with her when she came to sit down by the fire, and read them critically. This gave me time to collect my wits,

though I lost them again whenever I looked at her, she was so sweet and pretty and altogether desirable.

She professed to find the article learned, and asked me if the literary people who printed my productions knew how very young I was.

This roused me. "They're not an insurance company, you see," I replied, "so I haven't to fill up a form giving confidential details. Besides, I thought I had told you that I ran about the streets of Memphis with Moses when we were both little boys. I ought to have accumulated some knowledge."

I never knew anyone who could modulate the voice as Doris can. When she replied there was penitence and veneration and laughter all blended into the most delicious mockery, and only her eyes smiled.

"I forgot," she said; "it *was* stupid of me. I do wish I had known you then. You must have been a sweet-faced, innocent little fellow. I suppose all the palace ladies made a pet of you and kissed your little curly-locks. I'm sure I should have done."

That made me grow venturesome. "I'm sorry to spoil the fancy," I said, "but you see the kiddies in those days were only allowed one curly-lock—the rest of the head was shaved. That wouldn't have been very attractive from the kissing point of view, would it? I should think my present head offers greater inducements, though I may be wrong."

I stole a glance at her and saw that I had alarmed her a little. She coloured slightly, but remained mistress of herself. "Of course you are wrong," she replied with a laugh, "it would be ridiculous to kiss a mummy. It wouldn't be sanitary."

She changed the subject dexterously, but I noticed



a rising and falling of the breast that had not been apparent before, and bided my time.

We had finished tea and were sitting by the fire when dad came up and looked down upon us benignantly. He turned out to be the *deus ex machina* of the play.

"He's shown you all his masterpieces, I suppose?" he inquired; and Doris, who is very fond of dad, looked up gaily and gave an affirmative answer.

"Including the big book he keeps locked up in the second drawer down, left-hand side, eh?" continued dad, winking furiously in my direction and ignoring my frowns. "Guarded like a miser's treasure, that is. No *Open Sesame* for anybody, so far as I can make out, unless it's you."

I was annoyed and disconcerted, not recognising the god, but this simply provoked dad to further efforts. Doris was naturally curious, but jumped to a conclusion.

"What do you mean, Mr. Dallinger? I don't think I've seen——" Then to me excitedly, "I believe you've written a book! Oh do tell me, please."

"Don't ask me," continued dad, whose face was beaming. "Mother and I aren't in at this—no fear. Thought perhaps you were. Whatever it is there isn't much room in it for anything else by the look of it. What's up, Dick? Have I put my foot in it?"

He went away chuckling and Doris became persuasive. Such a pleading look came into her wonderful speaking eyes: such a pleading note into her voice. She actually put her hand upon my arm. "I won't tell," she said.

"Neither will I," I returned.

She pouted and was adorable. "You might ; just to please me," she said, and I fidgeted.

"I should like to please you, but you see it isn't a book—it's a record. I began it for Irving and he's read it all. It isn't meant for other eyes."

She seemed very disappointed, but made no further protest, only a kind of hurt look went right to my heart. I could not bear the thought of hurting her.

"I should like you to see it," I stammered, "but I daren't show it you. Under certain circumstances . . . if I can manage the last entry all right . . . if you will help me to complete it satisfactorily you shall read it all."

It was said haltingly, and she may have felt the quick beating of my pulse, for I had covered her hand with my own, and I daresay I pressed it a little as I spoke. At any rate the colour left her face and the heaving of her bosom became more pronounced. What she may have guessed I do not know, but she averted her head and trembled a little as she replied in what was not much more than a whisper :

"I do not understand. How . . . how can *I* help you? I . . . I've never done any literary work."

She tried to speak more lightly as she said this, and she would have removed her hand but my own tightened upon it.

Blunderingly I told her how she might help me, and she became very still. It was a longer story than most men would have had to tell, and I was as frank as I knew how to be and concealed nothing. I think the loud beating of her heart must have silenced mine, for I had become very calm, and I awaited the verdict with something like composure.

When at length I took her other hand in mine and sought her eyes she did not avoid me.

"Dick," she whispered; "you'll believe me, won't you? I never thought of this. I suppose it was because . . . because you were different . . . because of your heart, I mean . . . but, but I believe I love you with all my soul . . . and I'm not a bit afraid."

I absolutely decline to record another word of what took place or of what either of us said just then. If any record is to be made the angels responsible for the archives of Paradise must make it, and they may not think it worth while. I will just say, however, that all sanitary considerations with regard to kissing mummies were ignored and without serious protest on Doris's part.

Talk about a new heaven and a new earth! Talk about Columbus and the discovery of a new world! I would not—but what is the use of talking?

We had a great deal to say, of course. "I can't leave poor old father," she said softly, looking up into my face with eyes in which even yet there was a suspicion of the tear drops that sorrow had not summoned.

"I won't ask you to," I replied. "But I'm afraid of him, darling. He won't think me worthy of you. He will think the risk too great. He will not dare to trust you to me."

For reply she nestled just a little more closely to me. "He is a very foolish old father," she said, "and he will give me to you ever so willingly. Oh, I know father. He is just a big child, and he will leave it to God to clear all the obstacles away; I know he will. He will be so pleased. Dick, he is the best and



dearest father—and, and . . . oh, how I wish mother were here ! ”

I helped to dry the tears, but they began to flow again when she remembered *my* mother. “ I daren’t go down, Dick ; I daren’t. I love your mother, and she’ll just hate me—I know she will ; and I couldn’t help loving you, could I ? ”

It all ended happily. Mother was sweet and motherly enough to set Doris’s heart at rest ; though there had to be another downfall when the parental blessing was sought. Dad restrained his tears apparently without effort, and remarked to me in a loud aside that it seemed to be rather a wet business.

“ I’ll save my weep, Doris,” he explained, “ until I take you down to your friend’s car. It ’ud make anybody cry to turn out a night like this—blest if it wouldn’t—but I’m hardened, and as Dick can’t go I’ll be proxy for him. I courted as good a girl as you before either of you were born ; and if we walk under one umbrella and you keep your eyes shut you’ll never know but what it’s Dick.”

“ Ee, Miss Trichud,” said Harriet, when the news had been published to the household, which was not immediately ; “ I seed it comin’, but I said nought. ’Melia said when she ’eard, they could ha’ knocked ’er down wi’ a feather, an’ you that delicate ; but as I said to ’er, things ’at’s nought much in ’em is easy knocked over. T’ minute I clapped eyes on ye both I knew ’ow it ’ud end. I don’t know ’ow, but I did. It’s same wi’ feelin’s as it is wi’ smells—you can’t always put a name to ’em.”

## CHAPTER XXXV

IN WHICH IRVING GIVES AN I.O.U. TO POSTERITY

“ **A**ND that is about the end of these records, I suppose ? ”  
I nodded.

“ I’m rather sorry.” Irving paced the room a few times with his hands behind his back before he came over to the mantelpiece again and looked down upon me. Even then he did not speak, and though his eyes were fixed upon my face I perceived that he did not see me.

So I waited and thought what a good, strong head he had and what a pity it was that such a fine man should have no wife. To be without a wife or the prospect of a wife seems to me just now a condition of outer darkness and miserable poverty all the more pitiable in that the sympathiser cannot relieve it.

He sat down at last, and resting his elbows on his knees supported his chin with both hands. “ I’ve been thinking it all out once again,” he said. “ I’m sure I’m right, but I’m feeling a certain weight of responsibility.”

“ Don’t,” I replied. “ We have all absolved you, and you have been faithful enough. Now that we are in the garden don’t worry about Notice Boards.”

“ That’s all very well,” he said, “ but whilst you are thinking of Utopia I’m thinking of eugenics.”

"You've thought of them before," I answered, "and discussed them with me at great length, and we reached, I remember, certain conclusions."

"I'm aware of it," he said, smiling, "but the devil of it is that sometimes things go wrong, and there's something due to posterity after all."

I felt that I must do my best to cheer him.

"Well, having acknowledged the obligation and handed posterity your I.O.U. why not bid dull care begone, and trust a beneficent Providence to put everything straight? Let me prescribe for you—Get a wife and don't worry."

"The two recommendations are incompatible, I'm afraid. Still, we'll let that go. If you could send me the medicine you prescribe it would be different. A prescription that cannot be dispensed is mockery."

His tone was almost bitter and there was, I imagined, something behind his words, so that I hesitated to reply and in another moment his mood changed, and he threw back his head and laughed.

"Don't fash yourself about me," he said; "I've managed to get along fairly well so far, and I'm glad to have lived to see you turn out something better than 'a slightly animated mummy.' That was the expression, wasn't it? Gad, you're no end of a marvel, you know, when one looks back eighteen months."

He seemed to dwell upon the thought.

"How do you account for it?" I asked, and he instantly became the doctor.

"One mustn't be too positive, but I should say in the first place that you were never quite as bad as you were thought to be. That, however, I cannot prove, but I am certain you have largely brought about your own renaissance. I'm a great believer in that



kind of thing, and if one can only induce the mind to take control of the body the limits of its influence cannot be defined. I have left you very largely to yourself, as you may have noticed."

"Irving," I said. "I have *felt* you when you have not expressed yourself in words. God bless you, old man, for helping me to live and for teaching me the meaning of life. If I were to die to-morrow, or to put it more emphatically still, if I were to know now for certain that I should die next week, I would still say *thank you* a thousand times for having persuaded me to live."

His eyes showed his pleasure. "You want to live because it's worth while," he said; "altogether apart from the girl?"

"I want to go on living—down here," I replied, "because I feel I have a place to fill; but in any case I have tasted life and it has been good—very good."

He leaned his head on his hand and looked at me gravely. "You may live a long time if you take reasonable care. I don't at all see why you shouldn't. But don't deceive yourself. You will always be a reed, not a rock. I'm glad this girl of yours is plucky and knows what she is doing, and I'm glad I hid nothing from her. To that extent my conscience is clear."

"There you go again," I grumbled. "You're a decent fellow, Irving, but come now, confess that you have strained a point—that your approval of our marriage is grudging. It rather spoils it for me, you know. I wish you could be more cordial."

He continued to look at me, but said nothing, and the smile that played about his lips was half-sister to sadness.

"It was this way," I continued. "As I went in

pursuit of life I found love, and I took it to my heart and treasured it, not knowing what it was. But it rooted itself there and grew and blossomed, and so intertwined itself with life that the two could not be separated. Doris is both my love and my life. What could I do ? ”

Then he spoke. “ You could do no other. In your place and in hers I would have done the same. There will be many who will blame you and pity her—many who for the sake of wealth or position would hand over their daughters or sisters to unclean libertines without shudder or misgiving, who will call this selfishness and sacrifice, and talk of ‘ the risk.’ Bah ! ” A deep frown settled on his brow, and his voice became almost passionate as he proceeded :

“ What would I have had you do ? I would have had you love. Love is health ; it is riches ; it is the essence and the end of life ; it is the reward God gives His human creatures for the pains of their humanity ; and the curse of God will surely rest on him who seeks to extinguish its flame.”

He bit his lip and I saw his face grow white and his jaw tremble a little, and in that moment I knew that his heart had spoken. He jumped up and paced the room with rapid strides, and his face was under the mask of the thundercloud. Then, as the emerging sun chases the darkness from the earth, a smile drove all his gloom away.

“ I’m a jackass ! Good-bye, old man. It was a sudden attack of the melodramatic—nothing serious, just a spasm. God bless you both, if you *are* a couple of silly fools ! Whatever happens you can count on me, always.”

Good old Irving.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

IN WHICH I CAST ANCHOR AND THE BELLS RING OUT  
MERRILY

SO like Columbus I found "the land whence come the spices," and their fragrance fills the air as I write. With nothing more than an occasional murmur from the crew—without a hint of actual mutiny—my *Santa Maria* bore me into smooth waters and I cast anchor in the bay of El Dorado.

It is early autumn, and I have brought my book of records to the table in the open window which looks out upon the lawn of my own house. Away beyond the smoke of the town, as across some mist-wrapped ocean, I can just discern the attic which held me prisoner so long, and from which I set forth on my adventures more than two years ago. I am glad to see it, for it is the storehouse of precious memories on which I shall draw from time to time as the seasons come round.

It was dad's idea that I should live across the bridge among the red-tiled eyesores, which are not so bad after all, and he found for me the dear little house which is our home. It is not too far away to keep mother from looking in twice a day, and it is on the Overburn road and therefore more convenient for Mr. Chesterfield.



The padre would not come to us, although he loves us both and makes us feel it. I cannot write of him—I cannot let my thoughts rest on him a moment—without a quickening of the pulse as a wave of affectionate emotion sweeps over my spirit. I would gladly have had him here, but he thinks it best for young people to be alone. Perhaps when the winter storms blow and the nights are long and dark he will come down and occupy the “prophet’s chamber,” which we have prepared for him. I hope he will; and I think nothing else is needed to complete Doris’s joy.

Meanwhile he is happy with his books and his flowers and the simple folk to whom he offers the ministry of love, and who pay him lavishly in the same coin. We are not over-anxious, for good Mother Pegg keeps house for him and Fanny is full-grown and capable. Ephraim sleeps in the shelter of the wall that borders the old churchyard, and his wife is well content because he is now safe.

We shortened Irving’s period of probation and were married on a glorious day in June when the sky was blue and cloudless, and a company of larks in high heaven made choral music for us. It was a simple ceremony, but the church was not large enough to contain the crowd that came to see the bride they loved; and how many boxes of confetti were emptied upon us I dare not calculate. When Doris came up the aisle on her father’s arm I wondered for a moment if my old ship were going to founder after all, but it righted itself, and the suspicious bulge in the breast-pocket of Irving’s coat, which may or may not have had some connection with a certain “A” mixture, remained unrevealed throughout the proceedings.

The padre would not marry us, and Doris was disappointed, but she did not protest. "The dear mother and I will stand side by side," he said ; and we were both silent.

Tom Bird was best man. I wondered if I ought to ask Irving, but whilst I was thinking about it he himself suggested Tom and set my mind at rest. I wanted Tom badly. The poor fellow had suffered severely when he was rejected for the army, but everybody else had known that a man with a limp had no chance of passing the doctor. If there are people foolish enough to act Don Quixote to wandering field-mice they must be prepared to pay the penalty.

So Tom accepted my invitation, not without many misgivings and much persuasion, and duly appeared in his best suit with sundry additions from the wardrobe of the late Levi Turner. Tom has settled down—more or less—since Levi's death and works long hours in the market garden ; for, as he says, "With all them mouths to fill somebody's bound to have to graft." He was frightfully nervous, but as proud of his post as any victorious general.

The Little Chap acted as page, but as Doris was wearing no bridal robe but just a dainty summer dress, which I make no attempt to describe, his duties were light. He gazed up into our faces as if he wondered what it was all about ; and when the benediction had been pronounced he amused the congregation and embarrassed Doris by asking in what was meant for a confidential whisper—"Aunty, does it mean that you belong to Uncle Onry for his very own ? "

Sandy was waiting for us in the roadway, for we were to drive to the padre's house in state. He had borrowed a silk hat for the occasion and was in mortal

fear all the time that it would blow off, and therefore kept his head at an angle that suggested a perpetual obeisance. Village children ran before us, scattering flowers of the fields and the hedgerows as we walked down the churchyard path. I have read of the weddings of nobles and princes, but no wedded pair was ever dowered with richer gifts than Nature and her children bestowed upon us that day.

And that reminds me. We were seated in the carriage and about to depart when John Boyle pushed his way through the crowd and came up to us, holding out his hand. Even now there was surliness in his voice, but I think it concealed an unusual shyness. He laid a small package on Doris's knee and said to me—"If aught 'ud make me believe i' angels she would. So take care of 'er. They're scarce."

I have taken care of her for six weeks or more, and my love grows deeper every day.

She is sitting now upon the lawn in the sunlight and some one has opened the gate and is going up to her. It is Hannibal Wood, and he has a bundle in his arms which he carries carefully. He has carried it like that all through the town, stopping occasionally to push back a fold of the shawl lest it should impede the breathing of the tiny creature that lies within. I know, because he has been before ; and all Netherleigh knows.

Doris has taken the bundle from him, and the fond and foolish man is down upon his knees looking into his child's face as it lies upon her knee, and adoring. Doris is straightening out its clothes and arranging the little hood ; and now she kisses it, and Hannibal's smile reaches across the lawn and spreads over my own face.

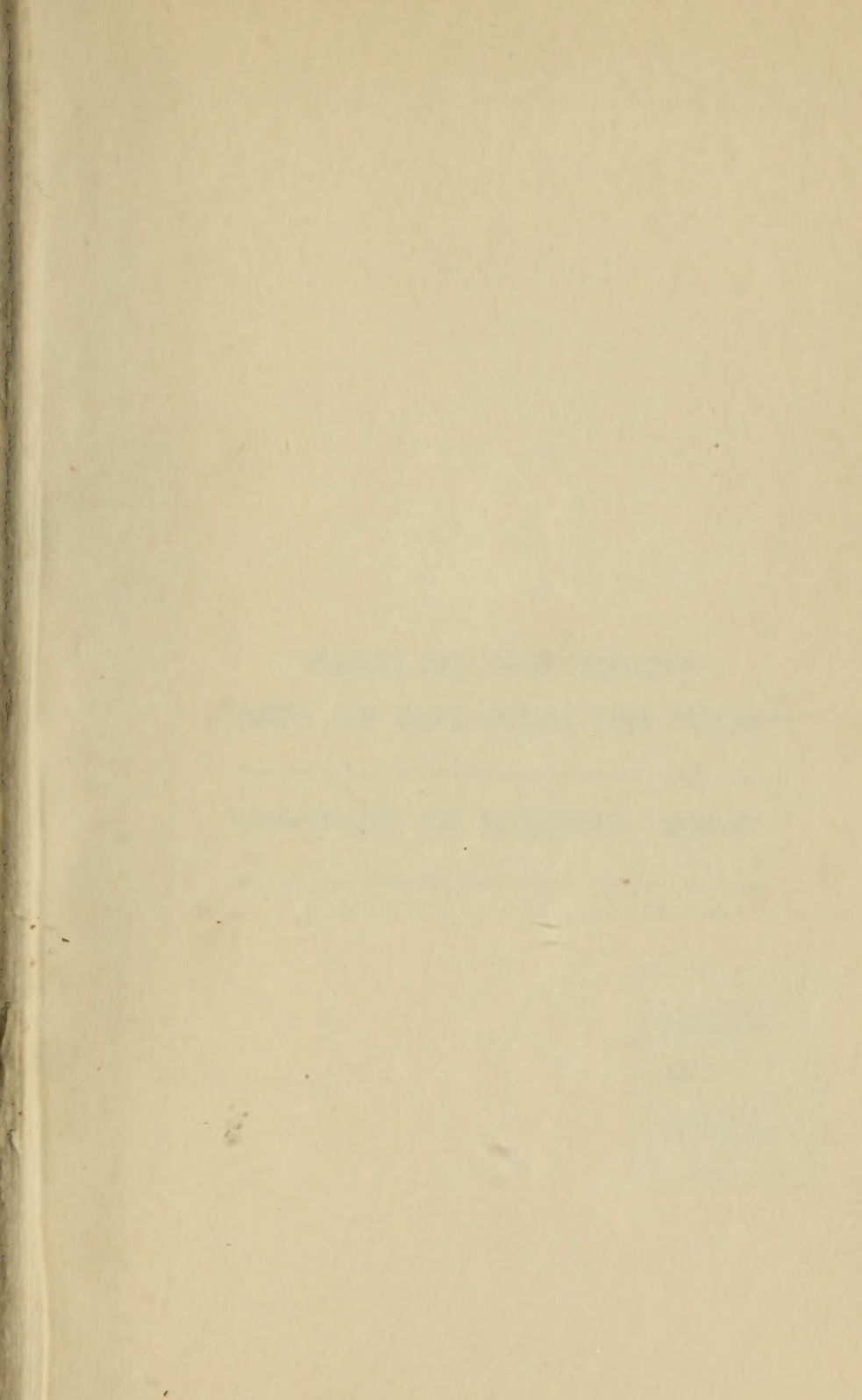


Behold Miss Janet—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Francis Terry—hurrying across to join in the baby worship. Their house overlooks ours, and the little lady's eyes are still sharp enough to see everything she wants to see. She has a large kitchen fork in her hand and a coarse apron covers her dress, so it is evident that she has not finished her work yet. Terry called in on his way to the office an hour or two ago to tell me that his wife had got a new way of planting lawn-seed. "She stabs holes in all the bare places with a fork and drops the seed in so that the sparrows can't get 'em." It must be rather exciting, one would think.

Well, I must close. Mother will be here before long, for Harriet is rattling the tea-cups, and Harriet knows times and seasons. We could not do without Harriet, though I suppose we shall have to if Pimple comes back from the war. The poor girl was heartbroken when she thought she was to remain with mother, and she just *had* to come. As Simpson's young man has married her and taken her off to America ("out o' t' way o' t' war," as Harriet remarked contemptuously) I cannot help feeling sorry for mother. But in addition to the new maid she has dad, and with all his peculiarities dad is well worth having, as I have reason to know.

I said I must close ; but how can I when a soft cheek is placed against mine, and soft round arms are clasping my neck, and the sweetest of lips touch my own ?

It is well. Doris, light of my life, we will continue our adventures together, hand in hand !







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